MRS. J. WORTHINGTON WOODWARD

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Carrie B. Neely -
1904.

Mrs. J. Worthington Woodward

A NOVEL

By
HELEN BEEKMAN

BRENTANO'S
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NOTE.

THIS story has only recently been published and offered for sale under the name of "Dainty Devils." Inasmuch as the original title selected was found to be misleading as expressing the character of the book, the present name, "Mrs. J. Worthington Woodward," was chosen as being more appropriate.

This explains the head-line differing from the title-page in the present volume.

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PREFACE.

My niece, born Gretchen von Waldeck, by marriage become Mrs. J. Worthington Woodward, and familiarly known in the beginning and up to date, as "Dot," had held me her slave since the morning I went, in the chill of a summer rain, to see my sister Margaret's newborn daughter. An hour later, as I sat dreamily holding the tiny infant, the distracted father came to tell me that the young mother was dead —my Margaret and his: mine first, if his more nearly.

The helpless personality in the bundle within my arms was all that kept my brother-in-law from suicide. To that baby he devoted his days and his strength, and she grew and thrived and was blissfully unconscious of the fact that the situation was a most pathetic one. No baby was ever more gurglingly content, no child more boisterously joyous, no young girl more saucy and happily self-sufficient, than motherless, brotherless and sisterless Dot. Watching her with adoring eyes, I wondered what it must be

like to have so keen a perception of all the beauty and gladness in the world. As she grew up she seemed impervious to any sense of trouble or pain—and, fool that I was, I expected her always to remain as she had been.

Meeting her then, after a six-months' dwelling in the home which marriage had brought her, the half-tearful gravity brooding over her young face, the earnest questioning in her round blue eyes, sent a poignant stab through my old heart. In my reading of the girl's nature, I had made one huge mistake: the same sensibility which responds to every impression of joy, answers as readily to sorrow.

Poor little Dot had been having experiences too rapidly, and was upon the verge of a serious collapse. It was the unexpected receipt of a telegram announcing that she and Jack would leave shortly for Europe, which had brought me into the City to spend a few hours with this child, whom I so loved. Dot's father was to come, too, but not till the last day she would be at home. I was astonished at finding Dot so extremely nervous and overwrought, although, to be sure, some of the gossip in which she undeservedly figured, had found its way even to Graytown. As I listened to Dot's rapid, excited talk, so rapid and so excited as to be at times upon the border of incoherency, the painful real-

ization of how complete and trying the difference in the circumstances of her life had been, overwhelmed me. Gravely and anxiously enough I received all the news she poured out to me. I think it was a full hour before I succeeded in leading her away from matters in New York, and we spent a while together in Graytown, imaginatively. This Graytown conversation greatly improved matters. Pretty, pathetic Dot became pretty, laughing Dot again. She forgot temporarily her troubles and perplexities until some chance remark of mine—I do not know what it was—brought recent events and complications back to her. There was an immediate suggestion of tears behind the laugh with which she said:

"Oh, Nunk! I've an enormous secret to tell you."

Candidly, I felt slightly alarmed; could there by any possibility be more "secrets" than the newspapers published?

"I've written a book, or a lot of stuff you might not dignify by such a name."

Relief made me gratifyingly enthusiastic in my expression of pleasant amazement at this disclosure. Innocuous sheets of scribbled paper! How unspeakably more desirable than new "matter" for newspaper sensation! Most eagerly did I request to be permitted to see her "secret."

We were in the most charming room in the Woodward house, the library. Since Dot's arrival, its large formidable desk had been supplemented by a delightful affair utterly feminine and ornamental in appearance, at which Dot had penned notes and invitations, and, as we all thought, nothing else. I was surprised to find that the fragile creation had a drawer that locked, and which Dot now opened with an air of grave importance. She drew out a wad of manuscript, and turned to me deprecatingly.

"It's awfully mean," said she, ruefully, "but my writing it was a kind of revenge, I'm afraid."

I reached for the manuscript.

"No, not yet. First promise you won't laugh."

"I promise; I'd swear, only ministers must not."

Still her slim, little hands tightly held the manuscript away from me.

"We're going to Europe next week, Jack and I, aren't we?"

"Yes; all this gorgeousness doesn't seem to satisfy my country niece."

Dot looked painfully hurt as she continued:

"Well, I don't care if we never come back—except," hastily, "to see you and father. There! I'm nervous and tired to death, and ready to cry, don't you see? Oh, take this paper, Nunk, if

you like, and do just as you please with it. I don't want to give it to father. He would grieve over it too much."

I took the manuscript, and Dot wiped a few tears from her cheeks. I did not begin to read until she and Jack had been three or four days at sea. They are safe in Switzerland now, and you may read the ravings of Dot's brain if you want to. Frankly, I found them very different from what I had anticipated, and perused them with interest to the end. If the style of her composition seems crude and wholly regardless of known rule, pray remember that Dot is not yet nineteen. Should too much family pride appear in her character, do not forget that her grandfather was Count von Waldeck, who came to America during the political troubles of '48, and that as her German blood proves itself in her complexion and blonde braids, her mental qualities are no less colored by the strain of the von Waldecks. Her independence, her gaiety, her quickness of wit, are all American; her conservatism, her sensitiveness, her power of thinking things out, are truly German.

My part is now finished. The rest of the book, beyond an occasional mention, has nothing to do with

DALTON DARE.

DAINTY DEVILS.

NOVEMBER.

Four days ago we arrived from our wedding-trip, having been married in June, at my uncle's church in Massachusetts. My wedding-day was my eighteenth birthday. A week after we were married, Jack and I sailed for Europe, which was awfully hard upon father, but very delightful for me. The only thorn in that rosy morning, was parting with father when the steward sounded the ghastly gong on the deck. At that moment I was dumb and blind with misery, but I was not deaf, because I heard the noise that wretched steward made, not only then but for hours afterward, and, insanely enough, it seemed to me that the unearthly din took father from me. I cried so terribly that an old maid with a wig told me three days later I could not possibly be

in love with my husband, or it would not have overcome me so to part with my father. A lot she knows! Jack hated her, too.

My husband's name is written "J. Worthington Woodward" and the men call him "Worth." Now, certain people in Graytown had upon several occasions absolutely disgusted me by insinuatingly asking how many millions I should "guess Mr. Woodward was *worth;*" and therefore to call my heart's beloved by an expression intimately connected with the idea of his money, was for me next-door to an utter impossibility. So I asked him what "J." meant, and hearing it was John, the only sensible thing to do was to call him "Jack." Anyway I think it a contemptible slight upon the writer of a Holy Gospel to give his name to a child, and later chop it down to a meaningless initial used simply as a humble foil to a three-syllabled middle-name. To be sure we may take it for granted that an Apostle has more common-sense and less touchiness than human beings still trammeled with their bodies of clay. At least I hope he has. Because I knew a stern old lady named Tabitha Ann who heard that her daughter-in-law was about to name the new baby for her. Greatly elated and a trifle suspicious, the grandmother hastened across the State of Massachusetts to be present at the christening. Barely had she

laid aside her bonnet when she asked the young mother:

"Are you sure you wish the baby named for me?"

"Yes, mother," sweetly.

"And you will call her Tabitha—no nickname?"

Baby's mama fidgeted a bit.

"We intend to name her for you exactly, Tabitha Ann, and we shall call her Annette."

"If you don't intend to call her by her given name, have her christened Annette right off and be done with it. I see you are too hifalutin to call the child Tabitha. So name her as you please, and may she be proud of your choice! As for me, I am going straight home."

Temper, tears, the son's intervention, more tears, even a high fever—meanwhile grandma had not gone, and in due time the minister bravely baptized the infant Tabitha Ann. There is at times a great deal in a name. This cowardly concession to the grandmother was worth exactly fifty thousand in the old lady's will.

Peter, James and John, do not personally protest when they are treated as this grandmother would not be; therefore we have P. Stuyvesant, J. Ferguson, J. Worthington, etc., *ad infinitum.* Perhaps the Apostles smile.

Jack is thirty-five, very big and handsome,

and half the girls in New York wanted him; some for his millions, some for his good-looks, some for both. Of course I firmly believe that no other girl ever loved him quite as deeply as I.

It certainly was amazingly queer that Jack married me. People say we shall be separated in two years. Maybe we shall—if death us do part.

My grandfather, Count von Waldeck, left Germany in political disgrace and noble poverty in 1848. Being informed that Massachusetts was more tractable than New York to the learning which he intended to impart—Greek, Latin, German and music—he turned his back haughtily upon an offer made him by a rich grocer upon the voyage, and traveled on to Graytown, where he settled with his title, a few books and no money. I have never been able to feel sure that grandfather's Greek and Latin would have stood the test had any one applied for instruction, but no one ever did, so he kept the dead languages for quotation and earned a scanty living between German and music. The minister liked him, and the minister had a daughter: small, dark and sprightly. She was my grandmother, and they say I have my figure from her. I positively have not a German one, nor German hands or feet; I am exceedingly glad to have a few American points, as my face belongs in Bremen.

Grandmother's father insisted that she should

be called Mrs. von Waldeck, and not Countess. Oddly enough, grandfather did not object to this in the least, although he had a deal of pride in his name and family; it was only grandmother who made a fuss and took on an habitual pout—you can see it in her painted portrait up at Graytown Rectory—which rather became her, and which is the expression I fancied noble ladies wore, until I grew up and knew better. My grandparents had only one child, my father. That grandfather, loving the very word "Germany," came finally to pride himself upon being an American, and dropped his title of "Count," worked more and more upon grandmother's nerves, and, the villagers said, hurried her into her grave.

That is all nonsense of course, but grandmother actually did worship a title, and died at thirty-six.

She made, if not enemies, many "cool friends," in Graytown, by saying upon several occasions, "The von Waldecks were of the most important nobility in Germany, long before America was discovered." Now the Plymouth Rockers did not accept that statement with pleasure, even in the end, and at the beginning openly discredited it. However, one of those persons predisposed to research upon all possible subjects—I think he would not have minded being deputized to

look up the genealogy of one particular mosquito —investigated grandmother's proud claim, and discovered it to be undeniably true. The von Waldecks were much more ancient than Columbus! The Plymouth Rockers, defeated but by no means baffled, from that day on grudged grandmother even the bare name von Waldeck, without the Countess that she craved.

That was, after all, some kind of satisfaction, however ignoble, for so appallingly noble a lady.

Although I never saw grandfather, he must have been exactly like father, who inherited the German and music pupils along with the von Waldeck countenance.

I can well comprehend how grandfather hated the Army, and unlike his brothers, preferred the quiet life of books and country pleasures, to an Officer's existence. I believe it was the study of Jean Jacques Rousseau which placed grandfather upon the side of the People in 1848, to the rage and horror of all his relatives and acquaintances. Pride is a sin in which I have some grievous participation, but in nothing am I quite so proud, as in the knowledge that grandfather had the courage of his convictions, although that brave steadfastness cost him everything so far as his Fatherland was concerned. And I am positive that my dear father would have had the same convictions, and would have

undergone the same exile with the same calm dignity.

Needless to remark that father was poor, heroically and aristocratically poor, and his marriage with the new pastor's sister, Margaret Dare, did not add to his worldly possessions. The pair were, however, romantically happy for two years. Then I came and mother died.

So I grew up in the "Professor's" cottage, where we had hardly any furniture except books —which I suppose, properly speaking, only go to furnish the mind—and under the devoted care of my father, supplemented by the spasmodic attention of Lame Ann, who was housekeeper and nurse, and maid-of-all-work,—and who took her meals with us. Father got Lame Ann to come "just for a home," because between her limp and cross-eyes, no one who could afford wages would take her. What would have become of us if there had not been a Lame Ann?

Father taught me a great deal. French and German, of course, and his beloved music, and mathematics and history. For the last he had a passion almost as intense as his love for music. He made great men real for me, and I know exactly how they looked and acted. From ten years on, I was always in love with some King or Soldier-Knight of other days. That I should ever fall in love with a flesh-and-blood gentle-

man of modern times, the people of Graytown declared to be impossible. Father's friends, chosen almost entirely from the College Faculty, were old, scholarly and absent-minded, and no matter what degree of affection I might some day attain for one of them, he would never recognize me outside of father's study, for the simple reason that none of them ever looked at me. I fancy that if my corporeal dimensions had not obstructed a certain amount of light, even the nod I usually received would have been wanting, simply because my presence would have remained unknown. Sometimes, it is true, father would pull me fondly forward, and into evidence as it were, remarking:

"Here is Gretchen."

"Oh—yes—How are you, Miss Dot?" would be the result of this effort upon dear father's part. You see Lame Ann could not pronounce Gretchen, and as she invariably called me "Miss Dot," everyone in Graytown did so, except father, who had named me for mother, and called my by the German diminutive.

In spite of shabby clothes, plain fare, and long lessons, the years spent at home were very happy ones. We were wealthy in the possession of a good piano and a splendid violin, both of which I learned to play, and when one has lots of occupation and goes to bed so tired that sleep is de-

licious, it would be impossible to contrive to be blue. Although father never said so, I know the fact that he did not send me to school was the best proof of his great heartsickness about my mother, and of his inability to get along without me in the house. Lots of people advised father to marry again, and a widow with a good deal of money, and five children, wrote him a proposal. Lame Ann knew the handwriting and pieced the letter together out of the waste-basket. I was only six, but I well remember how Lame Ann limped in to my cot-bed and read me the epistle in a mixture of holy horror at the brazenness, and gloating satisfaction at gratified curiosity. A few days later Lame Ann confided to my youthful ears that father had written the widow a letter, saying he did not approve of second marriages.

How Lame Ann obtained this information, must be left to the imagination.

Children are never so stupid as some people think. If there is anything which exemplifies "wise as a serpent and innocent as a dove," it is the child of average intelligence. With my small experience of six years of life, I instinctively knew better than to speak of the widow or her letter to father. Not that I reasoned—I just felt that I was, by some uncomprehended force, prevented from speaking upon these sub-

jects. How I wish I had the same intuition to-day! But I have not. It seems that the serpent's wisdom evaporates in the same ratio as the dove's innocence.

Jack came into my life as unexpectedly as though he had dropped from the skies. He is good enough to say he thought I actually had fallen from heaven that day I bounced into Uncle Dalton's study with a message from father, that he had met the doctor driving like mad to old Mrs. Gage, who was dying. Uncle rose hastily, and when I realized that a tall strange man loomed up beside him, it was not only the breathlessness from running which kept me temporarily speechless.

"Well, Dot? Thought I was alone, didn't you? Let me present Mr. Woodward to you—My niece, Miss von Waldeck."

I did not even bow, but turned from Mr. Woodward to Uncle Dalton, and blurted out what I had come to tell:

"Mrs. Gage is dying, Nunk, and wants you."

"Oh," said Uncle Dalton, not a bit like a minister, but exactly like the kind-hearted gentleman he is, "then I must go at once! Can't you stay a while and talk to Mr. Woodward? He will be my guest for the next three weeks, dear."

Whatever made me do it?—Was it the last flickering gleam of the childish wisdom which

I had of late been losing? In those few seconds, I remembered I had on a blue serge frock made three years earlier, and most visibly let down in the hem, and that at home I had a better dress. Still there was some other vague reason, new dignity, I think, which impelled me. I drew back and said:

"Wouldn't it be better, if Mr. Woodward came to call upon father?"

Uncle Dalton turned with his coat half on and stared at me.

"I believe you're right, child. You see, Mr. Woodward, I forget that Dot has grown up."

Such a troubled look had flooded into Uncle's big eyes that I felt too silly and awkward for words. A scalding blush spread up to my yellow hair, the first wave followed by a second at the recollection of how ugly, according to Lame Ann, a blush made me appear. Jack came nobly to the rescue.

"If Miss von Waldeck will permit me to walk home with her, I shall be very glad."

I shall never admit to Jack the battle these words precipitated into my heart. On the one side was overwhelming joy at the idea of parading that stunning man through Main Street—and I meant to take him the long way—in the face of all the matrons and maidens of Graytown; on the other side was fierce regret that if Mr.

Woodward accompanied me, I should necessarily be in my let-down blue serge with a white crocheted shawl for a wrap, and having arrived with him, I should be obliged to stay as I was through the length of his call. He would never know how nice I could look, in other clothes!

"I think," said I, redder than ever, "that I —that father would rather have Mr. Woodward call in about an hour."

"Oh," said Jack, apparently not at all abashed, "very well."

Meanwhile Uncle stood holding the study-door open for me.

"I am naturally in a bit of a hurry to reach Mrs. Gage," he said gravely; and from Uncle Dalton that was a reproof.

"Good-bye, Mr. Woodward. You will be sure to come?"

The idea that Uncle was displeased with me added immeasurably to my already great nervousness.

Jack laughed. He says he could not have helped it had his life been the penalty. I understood that I had shown undignified eagerness, and in utter confusion ran past Uncle and out of the Rectory. Reaching the street I quieted down into a walk. But I went home the short way.

Father, sitting in the library, received my

news not at all as I had expected, for he had known for two days that Uncle was to have a visitor from New York, who was in a law-suit about some Graytown property. It was exactly like father not to have told me.

"An old man, is he not?" asked father.

"Oh, no. Just right," I replied, earnestly.

"Just right?" echoed father. "Just right for what?"

"For—Uncle," faintly. And Uncle was father's age!

"That certainly is not young, my child."

"He's younger than Uncle," I said, hastily, "and handsome."

"You seem to have observed him well, Gretchen."

"I've got to see Lame Ann about something," I remarked irrelevantly, going behind father's chair. Out of the range of his eyes I made the announcement I had resolved upon because Mr. Woodward had laughed at me.

"Unless Mr. Woodward asks for me particularly, father, I'm not coming down."

"Oh, of course, Gretchen; but get ready, my child."

That was exactly what I intended to do. I considered it uncannily clever of father to know. Quite crestfallen I sought Lame Ann in the kitchen.

"Ann, I was out in the wind and my hair is awful. Have you time to braid it?"

"No, I've not."

"Oh, Ann, how nicely you have ironed my turn-over lace collar. I can put it on right away."

Ann set the flat-iron down with a vicious thump.

"And have it crumpled in five minutes! I ironed it so you could wear it with your brown cashmere on Sunday."

"I'm going to wear my brown cashmere right away, Ann. I expect company. A—gentleman."

"Pooh! Don't fix up for the old mummies who come here, Miss Dot. Not one of them knows or cares whether you have two eyes or three. You might just as well be a nigger-wench for all the difference." Ann's scorn was magnificent, as she hobbled over to the range for a fresh iron.

I made a face at her back and picked up my lace collar.

"My visitor," I said, grandly, "is from New York, and is not old. If you don't want to do my hair for me, never mind."

I made hurriedly for the back-stairs which led directly from the kitchen up into my tiny band-box of a bed-room. Lame Ann was almost as quick as I was. She came stumbling at my

heels, iron still in hand, and as I shut and locked the narrow door at the top of the steps, she sent a perfect wail after me.

"Oh, Miss Dot, of course I'll do your hair! Lordy, if you shouldn't be ready when he came! And from New York! Open the door, there's a good child, and let your old Ann in."

"I'll think about it," I said, glorying in the unusual opportunity of punishing poor Ann. I was rapidly unbraiding my hair.

"I'll put the iron back and come up again," began the poor soul. At that I darted to the door, because I could not stand the idea of the old creature struggling up the stairs again, and unlocked it in a rush of repentance.

"Give me the iron; I'll poke it into the wash-basin. And hurry, Ann. He'll be here soon."

I do not know who was the more nervous—Ann or I. Ann, who was immensely proud of my long, unmanageable locks, braided them once and found that she had left a heavy strand loose. Undoing them, she pulled and tangled till tears of pain stood in my eyes.

"If you'd stop asking questions, Ann," I said, crossly, "you'd probably get along better."

"Lordy, Miss Dot, a gentleman from New York doesn't come every day! But only to stay three weeks? What a pity!"

If some one had told us then that at the end

of those three weeks I should be engaged to the stranger, I think the notion would have petrified us. Yet Lame Ann has never ceased relating how she knew from the first that Mr. Woodward was my "fate."

"There! Your hair's done, and looks beautiful. Put on that nice stiff white petticoat, Miss Dot, the one I did up last week. It holds out the brown cashmere so that it looks like broadcloth. And a blue bow at your throat. You're just right-complected for blue."

All of Ann's advice I followed. She was a great believer in starch, and when I went downstairs to father—for I had repented of my rash resolution to wait until I was called—he said he heard me from the upper hall, "crackling."

I did not admire that word, nor find it a compliment. Before I could protest, however, we heard a step on the frozen garden-path and father went to open the house-door.

Every bit of that visit I can distinctly remember. Long afterward, when we were married and traveling in Europe, I asked Jack what he had thought of us that afternoon? He answered that his feelings were too deep for words; he could have laughed or cried over the whole thing. He says my candid scrubbing and brushing and starching in preparation for company during the hour which I had asked for, made him

long to laugh, but that dear father's fine face and stately bearing in the shabby surroundings, made him want to cry. To him the most touching part was when father, after talking enthusiastically of Rome, said, in response to a question as to how recent changes impressed him:

"I have never been in Rome, nor any place farther than New York. Travel would be supreme joy to me; and above all I long to see my father's Fatherland."

No one but a homesick exile can understand father's joy at the discovery that Jack had graduated from the University of Heidelberg, where grandfather had also studied. Father had a couple of badly-done little water-colors of the River and the Schloss which grandfather had treasured throughout his varying fortunes, and these father brought out and showed with palpitating pride to his delightful visitor. Were they like?—Would he recognize them?—

Jack was very kind to the poor little pictures, although too honest to pretend that they bore much resemblance to the beautiful Neckar and the picturesque ruined Schloss. So delicately did he put it, that no picture could adequately reproduce the charm and poetry of Heidelberg scenery, that father's sensitive faith in every thing that belonged to grandfather was unhurt. The two men became more and more

enthusiastic in their conversation, and I accuse Jack to this day—insincerely I admit—of having succumbed to the traditions of father's study, and of forgetting me completely.

Even were this so, he assures me that the pathos of father's love and yearning for the land he had never seen, were much more engrossing than such a pink-and-white piece of health and irresponsibility as I was.

It is very evident that while by no means a liar, Jack is at times not scrupulously truthful. Judging by myself, I believe he was already interested in the stranger he had met at Uncle Dalton's, to the exclusion of everything else, pathetic or ridiculous. Only I admit I never could have pretended that flattering interest in the discussion of Heidelberg which Jack did so beautifully. A positive climax was reached when Jack sang some words of a song which began, "Alt' Heidelberg, Du Feine;" father went into raptures and something in Jack's voice made me cry. Father could not see me and Jack—well, Jack was the same darling he is now and had the grace to pretend that he did not notice.

The call was prolonged till dark. When Lame Ann brought a lamp, Jack went away.

* * * * * * *

That was the 15th of March. The events of the following three months crowded upon one

another. It is an exceedingly queer fact, but fact it is, that one person wanting something makes some one else want the same thing, too. Gretchen von Waldeck, unloved and unknown, suddenly possessed two lovers, about as different in birth, looks and breeding, as they well could be. I had known Jack two little weeks when I asked him, one day as I sat peeling potatoes for Lame Ann:

"Are you really going away in a week?"

Jack took the peeled potato from me, dropped it into the basin of water (which I explained to him was to keep it white) and handed me a fresh one. When I recall this scene now!

"No," he said, smiling oddly; "I'd like to, but I think it will take me longer."

I peeled industriously. Feeling that my eyes would tell how glad I was, I kept them religiously set upon the big potato-eyes beneath my knife, instead of raising them to the big human ones above me.

"Lawyers are always slow, Uncle Dalton says," I remarked.

"It's not lawyers," said Jack. "It's something quite different."

In my astonishment I glanced up quickly.

"What?" I asked, and then hastily looked down again, in the most unaccountable confusion. Jack's eyes had upset me.

"You will know some day," he said, slowly.

I am pretty sure I knew then.

A day or two later, in short, Sunday afternoon—most ominous time—Reuben Stevens came to call upon Miss Dot. Now society in Graytown is entirely democratic. I was Count von Waldeck's daughter: Rube "was just as good"—Was he not the undertaker's son?

Rube was small in length, breadth and thickness. Afraid of suggesting his grave avocation, when not professionally employed he successfully avoided anything black.

Accordingly his shirts and cravats were veritable barber-poles, and his jewelry jingled and glittered with spectacular garishness. Rube remained an hour, interspersing his conversation of choir and early vegetables with frequent sighs directed at me. Father was taking a nap, and Lame Ann was reading her Bible. I do not think I could possibly have endured Rube that long hour had I not been sustained by the thought that Graytown gossips would now have visual proof of their error—a young Graytown eligible had called upon me. And on Sunday afternoon!

When Rube rose to go, he asked me with a great deal of unwarrantable assurance, whether he might come again. Personal prejudice made me want to deny him permission; the rec-

ollection of the gossips stayed me in the tempting ungraciousness. I wickedly told him I should be delighted to see him, the next Sunday afternoon. I had forgotten the row which Lame Ann would create. The second time Rube came, I should have to ask him to tea, and Lame Ann unfailingly delivered a scathing lecture over every extra plate and cup she had to wash. Truly, when father invited Mr. Woodward to dinner, Lame Ann had been all smiling interest, and had, for the first time since she entered our house, waited at table and not sat down till she had brought in the coffee. I felt absolutely certain that Rube Stevens would not evoke the like condescension. After five minutes' consideration of my rash act, I concluded not to tell Lame Ann anything beyond what she already knew—Rube had called. How could I have been so mistaken in Lame Ann? Did I not know by long experience that her eyes although so frightfully crossed, were sharper than mine, and that her ears in perfection of their function outstripped her eyes? As for her conscience, in spite of long and fervent Bible study, it was to say the least, very adjustable.

Barely had I decided upon the diplomatic silence, when Lame Ann burst into the best room, where I had received Rube and whence he had just departed.

"Miss Dot, you needn't waste your time on that little jinny-spinner of an undertaker's son. I'm surprised at you, I really am, and disgusted, too."

"Ann, you forget that I am the mistress of this house and may invite whom I please to call upon me."

A sudden flame of illuminating good sense flashed into poor Ann's brain. As I look back I sincerely admire her for it. At the time I was entirely resentful of her wisdom.

"Mr. Woodward means to marry you, Miss Dot, and he is the best chance you will ever get. Don't frighten him off by this idiot of a Rube. Ask Mr. Woodward to tea, and I'll make salad and hot biscuit, but I'll not take a step for Rube. I've neuralgia badly of late, and no one knows when an attack will come on." This last with a positively vicious sniff.

"You're a wicked hypocrite!" I cried, hotly.

"No worse than you," responded Ann, as she hobbled out of ear-shot.

I was very silent all the evening, although Jack came. He found our Puritan custom of no music Sunday evenings, very trying, and told me father's Sundays were his saddest days merely because he could not relieve the crowding of his lonely thoughts by the music of his violin. I was greatly shocked at this expression of Jack's

feeling; yet he did behave so devoutly in church! At that time I could not understand how anyone who prayed in the morning, could indulge in what I heard an Evangelist once denounce as the "damning distraction of music," in the afternoon. What an ignorant, narrow-minded little savage I was! Oh dear me! If my better knowledge in some directions could only have been attained without my bitter and unfortunate elucidation along other lines!

That week Jack came twice every day. He tells me it was very hard to remain away in the mornings, but he so commiserated Ann in her hobbling haste the one occasion he dined with us, that knowing father would earnestly urge his stopping to dinner if he appeared before Meridian, he gloriously put himself out of the way of temptation and never came to our door before two in the afternoon. The first hour he devoted exclusively to father and cigars. The second gradually became mine, for father had to have his nap, although never admitting it, and would doze surreptitiously in his chair from three to four, while I dutifully darned socks or mended linen, or crocheted lace for pantry-shelves, to the delightful accompaniment of blithe conversation, the tempo of which was accentuated by happily excited heart-beats. Jack leaving at four, my heart subsided into wearily normal palpi-

tation, and I was lonesome and dreamy and absent-minded till eight in the evening, when the interesting and unusual gentleman again appeared.

Saturday night I was oddly nervous and dissatisfied with myself. Mr. Woodward would leave at ten, and if he stayed away in the afternoon, as he had done the previous Sunday, except for church in the morning I should not see him again till—after—I—had—had—Rube—to—tea.

Our Sunday dinner was barely eaten, however, when I heard a step upon the porch which was not Rube's. Joy, consternation, defiance and fright struggled within me. While father went to welcome Mr. Woodward, I retired pell-mell to my room. Sitting down upon the edge of the bed I swung my feet violently, the performance being proof positive that I was fiercely excited.

Rube would come—Sunday afternoon—To remain for tea. Did Mr. Woodward understand Graytown etiquette? Would he believe me engaged to that miserable idiot of an undertaker's son? My face flamed at the thought.

"Miss Dot, Miss Dot, come down and see Mr. Woodward."

"I'll be down later," I called back.

I went at once.

Mr. Woodward asked hastily if I were well.

"Awfully," I answered, annoyed at the question.

"I beg your pardon, you look so feverish," he said, anxiously, and waited a moment as though expecting some explanation for my want of repose. As I merely rubbed my hands nervously together and said nothing, Jack continued rather like one wishing to change the subject with a fretful child: "See what I have brought you, Miss von Waldeck. They came last night."

He pointed to the table where stood a beautiful edition of Longfellow in green-and-gold-and-mottled richness.

"Oh!" I cried in rapture, then I drew back; "I can't accept them from a gentleman. Can I, father?"

"Mr. von Waldeck has permitted," said Jack, smiling ever so slightly. "It is a trifle of a gift—who knows how much I may want to take?"

Father started. I am sure he thought of the Stradivarius. I did not. I merely bent over the books, my face turned away. Why are women so clever in divining how much or how little men like them?

"All I have," said father, gravely, "is at your disposal, Mr. Woodward."

"Thank you, sir," returned Jack. "I hope

I'll never take too unwelcome advantage of your courteous generosity."

Father sighed, still thinking, I am sure, of his priceless violin. I turned to Mr. Woodward to express my gratitude for the books, and caught a look upon his face which—well, it made my heart beat in my throat and caused a wild regret that I had invited Rube for that Sunday afternoon. I realize now that I never thanked Jack at all for those books. He seemed to understand that I was painfully excited, although he did not dream the reason, and in his usual kind way began to talk to father, leaving me to recover my mental equilibrium. When father said he had some letters to write, and went upstairs, I felt half-glad, half-sorry. However, I was not left long to the luxury of analyzing my emotions. Father had not reached his room before I saw Rube Stevens, resplendently attired, turn in at our gate.

"Oh, Mr. Woodward," I gasped, "Mr. Stevens is coming in—And I hate him," I added, vehemently.

Jack stared in astonishment.

"Can't you get rid of him, then?" he asked, curiously.

People talk about drowning men seeing all their lives in one horrible mental panorama at the moment of sinking. I fully believe they do,

for while Rube made his way to the front door, I laid a whole scheme of fibs to make him go away.

"Yes," I said, gulping. "Quick—go in here. He mustn't see you—"

I was about to say, "Or he won't believe me," but I did not dare tell Jack I meant to fib. I interrupted myself in the nick of time, and opening the door which led to the cellar-stairs, I pushed Mr. Woodward on to the small landing. Closing that door, I flew to the front one.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Stevens," I said. "I'm sorry that I'm feeling so miserable with a headache, that I shan't be able to entertain you."

"Ah, to look at you is enough, Miss Dot," entering unabashed. The day was very warm for April, and having hung up his hat, Rube drew out a silk handkerchief almost dripping with Stephanotis, and gently wiped his forehead, smiling at me the while. I recoiled before both smile and perfumery.

"Really," I said, "cologne is extremely repugnant to me."

"Is it, now?" he exclaimed, in consternation. "But we'll fix that, Miss Dot," he added, with a reassuring smile.

He went to the door, opened it, and dropped the offending handkerchief upon the porch. His simplicity was fascinating. Evidently unless I

asked him point-blank to go, there was no escape from Rube. I led the way to the study, wretched now in the thought that Mr. Woodward might think I had stooped to a trick because I was over-anxious to be in his society. What harm would it have been, after all, had Rube been caught paying his compliments to me? I flushed deeper and deeper and said nothing, leaving the making of small talk to my visitor. Fibbing always brings uncomfortableness of some sort or another, and if not in this world, undoubtedly in the next, when we and our fibs are bound to come face-to-face. Dreadful thought! And still, perhaps the horrible astonishment will be consolingly universal.

"Ah, you really look ill, Miss Dot," said Rube, anxiously, establishing himself, uninvited, I noted, in father's big chair. I sat opposite, rocking vigorously.

"Yes; perhaps, I'm getting scarlet fever. Are you not afraid of infection?"

And then! Oh! Shall I ever be able to recall that scene without hot tears of mortification rushing into my eyes? There was a smothered roar of laughter from the landing of the cellar-stairs, at which Rube sprang out of his chair and I sank deeper into mine. Nor was the laughter all. Jack, big, heavy creature that he is, had knocked over the rack that held a cane for Lame Ann's

assistance in going down into the cellar, and the stick went bumpety-bump from the top to the bottom of the stairs.

"Oh, goodness gracious, what is it?" asked Rube, visibly frightened. You see he had not been in the undertaking business very long.

Dear Jack! He was at the rescue, and patched up my blunder so far as anyone could. Flinging open the door, he came into the study, very red, very dusty and very determined.

"There certainly are rats in your cellar, Miss von Waldeck," he said, his eyes dancing. "Why, Mr. Stevens, how do you do?"

"Very well," eagerly; "but say, I've got a fox-terrier—a dandy. Shan't I go get him right off?"

"Oh, will you?" said Jack, enthusiastically. "It would be immense."

Rube paused, suddenly doubtful.

"How about the parson? It's Sunday."

"Uncle Dalton would never object," I managed to say. Then I was sorry. It looked as if I wanted to be alone with Jack. Which is not nice in a girl—to show.

Incredible as it may seem, Rube departed in all seriousness for his dog, waving me an airy farewell and giving a parting assurance that his terrier was "game." The door safely closed upon him, Jack again burst out laughing. I

dropped into my chair and joined him. For several seconds we simply looked at each other and laughed like two lunatics. Jack's mirth ceased suddenly, so suddenly that I started to find I was laughing alone. Instantly I grew serious, too, as though some one had peremptorily said to me, "Be quiet!"

"Gretchen!" said Jack after a tiny pause of death-like silence.

I jumped. My name to him was Miss von Waldeck.

"Yes, Gretchen," he repeated, sternly emphatic. "That boy wants to marry you. So do I. Which one is it to be?"

I stared, open-mouthed, began to stammer, to blush, and finally went to pieces.

"Oh, don't," I begged, beginning to cry.

"You musn't cry, little one," Jack said. "Rube will be back directly with the dog, you know."

Was there ever such a proposal before? Jack stood some three feet away from me and I crouched sobbing in the rocking-chair.

Jack came and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"You are over-excited," he said, gently; "I should not have asked you the great question now. It was following an unreasoning impulse. Anyway," whimsically, "your father is a Ger-

man and would like to be consulted first. Rube and his dog are my excuse for being so precipitate."

The picture of Rube and his dog, so unfortunately real and tangible, and the rats which existed only in imagination, here overcame me. From tears I passed back to uncontrollable laughter, much to Jack's amazement.

The yelping of a racing dog broke in upon us. My merriment subsided in a shiver of disgust. I stood up.

"I shall not marry Rube, Mr. Woodward," I said, very faintly, my eyes upon the floor.

"And I gave you only one alternative," he said, his voice ringing.

"Yelp! Yelp! Yelp!"

To that music Jack kissed my forehead.

Did we go through the mockery of a rat hunt? Hilariously so far as Jack and I and the dog were concerned; in chagrin and perspiration upon the part of Rube. At last Jack took compassion upon the panting disappointed boy and the panting snapping terrier.

"It's almost tea-time, and I must see Mr. von Waldeck. The rat is not here, so let's quit."

At that very instant the dog made a mad rush and we heard the squealing of a rat the next second.

"Jehosaphat!" screamed Rube, in ecstasy;

"didn't I tell you he was game, Mr. Woodward?"

"Fine little beast," said Jack, heartily. "You'll stop to tea, won't you, Stevens? I'll be here, too."

Rube ceased dancing about the cellar and stood stock-still. An ugly, unhuman expression settled upon his heavy lips.

"Have you got a mortgage here?" he asked, in his common way.

I sprang impulsively from my seat on an overturned barrel, tearing my gown upon a wicked nail as I did so. Jack was ahead of me.

"If Mr. von Waldeck makes no objection, Miss von Waldeck and I are engaged," he said, pausing half way up the cellar-stairs.

Rube gasped, struck mute and motionless.

Jack passed from sight at the landing; I trembled a little when I remembered that it was "to see father" he had gone. How awfully solemn and eternal the word "engaged" sounded! As for marriage—my heart jumped into my mouth. It meant leaving father!

"Why don't you congratulate me?" I asked, Rube's awkward presence compelling some recognition.

Rube whistled to his dog.

"I wanted you myself," he said, sullenly, starting to leave the cellar. What a stunning place

for the announcement of an engagement! Gretchen von Waldeck was certainly born for royal surroundings.

I ran up the ladder we called stairs; the dog scrambled behind me, Rube followed slowly, his head down.

He went straight for his hat.

"Won't you stop for tea?" I asked, politely, because I knew now that he would not.

"No, thank you. Come, Billy! Good-evening."

Yelp! Yelp! The dog was racing homeward.

Father came down the stairs, wet-eyed and solemn, although smiling.

"*Gott segne Euch!*" was all he said, putting my hand into Jack's.

At tea there was a bottle of old wine opened and drunk standing, Lame Ann being informed that she must drink her glassful to the happiness of Miss Dot and Mr. Woodward. She participated in the little ceremony emotionally, if not gracefully, and limped from me to Jack, to touch glasses and say, "Prosit!"

The meal was no sooner finished than father went to his room upstairs. I know now that he spent that evening with my mother; at the time I thought only of Jack and myself.

* * * * * * *

When Jack left Graytown we went together, bride and groom. It was the fifteenth of June. Jack has no very near relatives, and as our wedding was very quiet, he only sent announcements to his twelve or fourteen cousins of different degrees. We sailed without having met any of his relatives, as they were not in New York at that time of the year.

I never knew what I missed!

That is what a girl said the third day out on the steamer to Italy. She had been sea-sick till then, and as she finished her first meal at the table she sighed with heart-breaking pathos, "you never knew what you missed!" The remainder of the voyage she brought to every meal a huge black-bound book labeled in gold lettering, "My Trip Abroad." Into this book she faithfully copied every *menu,* not even using ditto marks for the repeats. It took all my power of self-control as well as my dignity as a matron, to refrain from asking her, "Will you tell them that you ate it all?"

The same girl after having been ashore at Gibraltar announced at dinner while various passengers were elaborating upon the beauties of the town and fortress, that the most interesting feature to her was the pork-market!

I used to be awfully happy! I do not mean that I am unhappy now, because I never could

be, so long as I had dear Jack. But since the moment my foot touched the pier in New York, somehow my utterly free-from-care condition—quite barbarian in its perfection—has not existed.

I feel suppressed by iron vices of conventionality, I am nervous at the thought of my pathetic ignorance of this social world, and frightened at the crucible I am sure the women in it will put me through before I learn their pace. I suppose the instantaneousness of the change in my mental attitude is rather a compliment to the feminine personalities who so subtly and successfully brought it about. I do not believe that any man living could be so quick, so quiet, and so effective in crushing out the heart of a fellow-being, as are some society-women. If man be "little lower than the angels," such women are a little higher—a very little—than the devil.

Jack is a perfect darling. I am nevertheless exceedingly thankful that he has no near relatives. Although, considering the matter, I do not believe that any one more closely related to Jack could be like his cousins—at least, like the two who met us at the pier. They greeted Jack effusively and kissed him—the impertinence! And they are both very pretty and graceful and wear exquisite frocks. Thanks to the patience and tact of dear old Jack, in these five months I have learned how to buy clothes, and

I know now how women ought to be gowned. These creatures are dainty to the highest degree.

As for their looks in detail, they have nothing in common, despite as I learned later, the fact that they are twins. Mrs. Allison has a slim dark face, straight features and very dark eyes under black lashes. Jack told me afterward that when Lou's face grows a trifle slimmer, she will have prominent cheek bones and a sharp, ugly chin. "Hatchet-face," he added, "the kind that in olden times penance and self-denial transformed into the countenances of saints, and which modern self-indulgence and skepticism convert into repellent angles. After all, 'hatchet-face' is hardly a fair description. Such faces in later life combine the ugliness of a hatchet with the sharpness of a sword."

In spite of Jack's prognostications, she is extremely good-looking now, and the deep secretive expression of her eyes holds one tantalized as to its meaning. Are such eyes beautiful for good or evil? I had a strange, recurring vision of Spoleto and Lucrezia Borgia, as I yielded to their fascination.

Her sister is much shorter in figure, and alarmingly thin, save her face, which is well-rounded and small-chinned. Her hair is blonde, very fluffy, in sharp contrast to Mrs. Allison's smooth black locks. She has dark sleepy-looking eyes,

set far apart, as though her short broad nose had demanded more space than was its right. Nevertheless Mrs. St. John is also decidedly pretty. Her snub-nose is redeemed by the short child-like upper lip to the full mouth, and her teeth are faultless. Such an unusual combination of hair and eyes, accentuated by the most bewitching pink cheeks, lends to Mrs. St. John's coloring extraordinary charm. Jack and I have held many animated discussions as to whether form or color is more conducive to beauty. Jack holds to the classic marble, the idealization of form. It would be the vastest kind of affectation if I pretended to agree with him. The beauty of statuary is for me the beauty of death; while the color of painting is vital. It appeals, it satisfies, and if true to nature, triumphs over many a defect of line. To my mind, Belle St. John is proof conclusive that coloring does more for feminine beauty than perfection of feature. Leave every line of her face the same, give her gray eyes, drab hair, and a sallow skin, and she would be positively ugly. As a matter of fact she is beautiful, because her coloring is her salvation to such a degree that one forgets the glaring irregularity of her features.

That I was shabbily treated, in short, cruelly treated, upon my arrival, does not prevent my acknowledging that Mrs. Allison and Mrs. St.

John are handsome enough to stand comparison anywhere.

But as we drove home, all four of us, I ground my teeth once to keep from saying, as I contemplated Jack's elegant cousins, "You dainty devils!"

* * * * * * *

The trouble began at the first words which followed Jack's introduction of his little wife, or perhaps to be more truthful, a second sooner, when Mrs. Allison—I will not call her Cousin Lou—kissed him. Let me confess that all the von Waldecks are jealous.

"She is a little bit of a thing, indeed," said Mrs. Allison, staring me over in a business-like fashion. It's the way I have seen Jack calculate the points of a horse some one wanted him to buy.

"Quite a child," added Mrs. St. John, deliberately scanning my costume from the tip of my boot to the top wing in my hat.

There was this difference in the surveys of the two women: Mrs. Allison did not move her eyes as she gazed, while Mrs. St. John lowered her chin when she stared at my boots, and elevated it gradually until her face was impudently tilted at that top wing which indicated my stature limit, including that portion attained by the triumph of millinery.

These remarks, spoken as if English were to me an unknown tongue, took the place of the customary greeting accorded by new relatives. That they considered me of the same genus, but of a different species from themselves, was painfully evident. At the moment my heart quivered with anger and humiliation. Now I feel exultantly glad that I am unlike them. One day in Graytown, Jack said to me, "If I had never met you, I should have died a bachelor, because I could never take the ball-room product as my wife."

On the pier, neither this recollection nor any other came to my comfort. I acknowledge that I was supremely hurt, frightened and angered by the cool criticism with which Jack's cousins received me. I was bitterly surprised too, for I had never doubted that Jack's friends would like me for his sake. And while I am undeniably small, no one had ever before seemed to find me ridiculous. Utterly oblivious of the incipient battle that waged in his immediate neighborhood, my adorable and unsuspecting husband immediately went off to hurry the trunks through, leaving me at the mercy of these women whose rudeness had already made me intensely dislike them. Stupidly I stood before them, rigid with wounded pride.

"How did you enjoy the voyage? I suppose,

being your first experience, that you were very sea-sick?"

"Not in the least; nor was it my first experience. I had to go to Europe before I could come back."

"Oh, now, that is funny! But you don't look as though you were joking. I hope you're never cross, because Cousin Jack detests sharpness in women."

This with a smile intended to be playful was from Mrs. St. John.

I ignored the remark because had I spoken, I could not have been polite, and I felt that I had already showed unbecoming pique, which these two would attribute to my general crudeness.

"You're an orphan, aren't you?" began Mrs. Allison.

"No." I did not explain further.

"Then," in a duet, "how odd that your parents are not here to meet you!" This was accompanied by a raising of the eyebrows.

"My mother is dead; my father is not in good health."

"He's a minister, is he not?"

"No." I felt a little faint. From the odors of the dock?

"What—" Mrs. St. John broke off. I knew she had started to say, "What is he?" only the

direct question was a bit too abrupt and unwarranted even for her.

"You know," said Mrs. Allison, in a sweet voice, "we felt it awfully that Jack didn't ask us to the wedding. Belle and I hardly knew whether to come to meet you or not. Only we are just like Jack's sisters, don't you know, and have to forgive and forget."

How I wished they had not!

"Was that nice-looking person in black your maid?" queried Mrs. St. John. She had made an inventory of Perkins' clothes as she had of mine.

"Yes." I began to wonder if there was a limit to their questions. I knew there was to my endurance.

"You got her in Europe, of course? She looks English."

"She's an American, and I took her from this side."

"Not from home?" said both together.

"No."

"Are you an only child?" Mrs. St. John.

"Yes."

"Where were you educated?" Mrs. Allison.

"At home."

"Oh!" in unison, with exchange of glances.

"Was it love at first sight?" Mrs. St. John.

"I beg your pardon?" I said, staring.

At that instant I saw Jack making his way towards us among piles of luggage and groups of more or less excited humanity. Are the pangs of conscience produced by the knowledge of smuggled articles reposing in divers nooks and corners, responsible for the nervousness among first-class passengers returning from Europe? Jack says he declares everything and gets off beautifully by paying the prescribed duty. He contends that every honest citizen should do the same. Granted even that the laws are a bit severe and unreasonable, they are still laws sanctioned by our Government, and no one deserves to be an American who cannot say heartily, in small matters as in great, "My Country! Right or wrong!" Whether I loved Jack at first sight or not, as I saw him cheerfully swinging towards us across the pier, I loved him a little better than ever before. He looked so contented and unhurried in the midst of noisy confusion, that I felt very secure of his ability to protect me from everything—even his cousins.

"Everything is attended to, and now we'll go home. It was so lovely of you, Lou, to have the carriage here. Wasn't it, Dot?"

I am no stranger to fibbing, but the lie required here would have choked a greater adept than I.

"What beautiful horses!" I exclaimed, as the trap drew up.

Now I knew better, I really did. I only did not wish to be obliged to answer Jack's question. Therefore when Mrs. St. John and Mrs. Allison exchanged smiles, I was dreadfully angry.

Jack put me in first.

"You next, Lou," he said, turning to Mrs. Allison. "I know you can't ride backwards."

"Oh," laughed Mrs. Allison, "I mustn't separate bride and groom. Don't you want to sit next to Mrs. Woodward?"

I blushed with temper and of course Jack thought it only pretty and becoming and natural and all that, and he said, very gravely:

"I can see Dot all the better from the front seat."

Mrs. Allison had not anticipated quite that answer so she looked rather blank—not to say foolish—as she sat down beside me.

It was less than half an hour's drive to the house that was to be mine, and which I had never seen. A horrible sense of not having been trained for the part I was perforce to assume, swept over me. The two finished women of the world who were with us, appeared like menacing precursors of a society which I felt was ready to cut me to pieces. I wished wildly that Jack and I had been alone. It seemed not too much to ask that the first sight I had of my new home should be without the company of outsiders.

Mrs. Allison talked incessantly, and half the time Mrs. St. John's drawl dragged along simultaneously, with now and then a word or two in the rear.

"What makes you so quiet, little one?" asked Jack, who while watching me, had been giving random answers to his cousins.

I smiled at him for reply, and felt a lump coming into my throat. Heavens! Was I going to cry?

"Are you always so silent?" asked Mrs. St. John, in a voice as sweet and airy as a meringue glacée.

The struggle to speak was once more ineffectual, but happily the carriage stopped. I looked out curiously, and beheld a big corner house with an entrance imposing enough for a European Art Gallery, facing what I knew must be Central Park. I grew limp, mentally and physically. What should I do in that huge place?

"We're home, darling," whispered Jack, as he lifted me out.

Home! I had a vague vision of the tiny cottage at Graytown, its small white front door, its narrow porch. I am ashamed for Jack's sake to acknowledge that in those first moments I was poignantly home-sick for that same white front door—which, to tell the truth, I had rather disliked while I was at home. Going up the

stone steps I stumbled. Jack having turned to answer a question of Mrs. St. John's, it was a man in livery who hastily assisted me. I dimly wondered if he also belonged to me. And I longed desperately for Lame Ann. Perkins was such a strain. How lovely it would be to hear Lame Ann say, "No, I won't, Miss Dot!" when I particularly wished something done! Jack had warned me that I must not converse with Perkins, and I had faithfully obeyed. And "No, Madam," "Yes, Madam," and "If you please, Madam," had grown terribly wearing and monotonous.

Another man in livery was holding the door open; we went through a tiled vestibule into the hall. I saw a marble staircase carpeted in scarlet. Farther back I saw pictures and potteries and palms. The ceiling was very high, and every thing looked more like some gorgeous public place than a home for two people lately married. Near the foot of the stair-case a tall, thin person in black stood awaiting us. Jack shook hands with her.

"Your mistress has come home, Mrs. Blackwell. This is the housekeeper, dear."

The woman bowed to me and I gravely bowed back. I felt as if I had come to visit in her house, and was taking a liberty by doing so.

"Lou and Belle will take you upstairs, Dot,"

said Jack, well-meaningly of course, but hurting me grievously, "while I talk over a few matters with Mrs. Blackwell. Perkins will arrive with the small luggage in a few moments."

It was too much. Jack might as well say "To the lions!" as send me upstairs with Mrs. St. John and her sister. Two big carved chairs stood one on either side of the table in the hall. Into one of them I sank and burst into tears.

"Why, Dot!"

Jack forgot his cousins and the housekeeper and was on his knees beside me.

"Oh, come with me, and send them all away!" I said, in German, sobbing abandonedly.

It was the housekeeper's voice that pulled me together.

"Madam seems very tired," she said, in freezing tones; "I will send Burton with some wine."

"Thank you, I don't wish any wine," I said, rising. "I will rest a bit, Jack, if your cousins will pardon me. I am extremely tired."

"Have luncheon served to Mrs. Allison and Mrs. St. John. Madam will remain upstairs. You will excuse us, Lou, won't you?" Jack was as easy and calm as usual.

"Oh, we see we'll have to. Don't bother about us, Jack; you know we're quite at home. We'll run in again some time to-morrow."

"Good morning," I said, dignifiedly as I could

with the consciousness of a red nose, and gathering up my skirts in that final way I had already learned.

"Thank you so much for meeting us," Jack added, as he picked me up and carried me upstairs.

He put me down in the most beautiful room I had ever seen—all rose color and lace, and soft white fur rugs. As he took off my wrap and hat and lifted me on to the lovely couch near the bay-window, I could answer his questioning smile, which I knew meant, "Do you like it?" only by fresh tears.

How seldom are we in fitting shape to enjoy the delights of the existing moment! Upon my arrival in my new dwelling-place I should have been happily sensitive and responsive to the beauty of my surroundings. Instead, I was in a perfect tempest of emotions, and doubly irritated because I knew what a satire my tears were upon the sentiments which ought to have been mine, when I came into the possession of luxury of which I had never dreamed. A little of the same feeling I experienced when, homesick for father, I started on that vast joy, a trip to Europe. Some disturbing, heart-sickening bitterness always mingles with the sweets of life. I fancy it is this universal alloy in our happiness that heightens all joys in the retro-

spect. The day I first saw the Matterhorn, my head ached splittingly. Thinking of it now, I feel the glory and grandeur of the mountain, and ignore the memory of my puny personal discomfort which at the time I fancied gigantic—Actually in the presence of the vast, magnificent, sublime Matterhorn! It is delightfully true that in looking back upon our pleasures, our rare and precious experiences, petty flaws are lost in the general perfection. Probably the day will come when I shall remember my entry into my pink-and-white bower as a moment of undiluted joy; at present the two cousins are too vivid a recollection. They were the thorns that pricked deeply and caused me plentiful tears.

I do wish dear Jack might have been spared the scene—which is no doubt wishing for the impossible in his regard, since imperfect happiness is the common lot. Clutching Jack hysterically, I sobbed out something to this effect.

"All sweets? Cloying sweets?" he laughed, in his deep clear voice. "Don't you know one has to bite into something sharp once in a while, to keep the zest for sweet things?"

Good as he is, Jack did not mean this for fault-finding, so I swallowed the hurt which he unconsciously gave me by admitting that I had indeed given him something "sharp to bite into." After a while, soothed by his presence and de-

sultory talk, I dropped off asleep. When I awoke, Jack's hand was on my forehead.

"I thought you were ill, dear; you looked so flushed."

"Oh, no," I said, jumping up. "I feel as well as possible. And Jack, I'm awfully green and I know it. But I shall not act like a baby any more. What a love of a room! Is it all real? Oh, Jack will I ever get used to it?"

My heart suddenly sank again.

"At once, you're so clever—"

That part was meant for me alone.

* * * * * * *

Perkins was all in a tremor dressing me for dinner that first night, and I sincerely sympathized. The elegance seemed to intoxicate her. For the first time since I left the ministrations of Lame Ann, my hair was repeatedly pulled. The climax was reached when Perkins, taking the hand-mirror from me, let it fall. She turned deathly white, between a superstitious horror and the thought of breaking anything so costly as a silver-backed mirror. The white fur rug was thick and the glass remained intact. So Perkins' exclamation died into a meek apology for clumsiness. It was all I could do to refrain from telling her not to mind—that I fully understood her emotions.

Going down stairs Jack whispered that I looked lovely—how very lovely I should like to look for his sake!—and he kissed me four times before we reached the dining-room and the presence of servants. The butler and the second-man were in the dining-room, and a parlor-maid stationed in the pantry hovered visibly near the shielding screen. The array of retainers at first made me nervous. Two pairs of eyes being fixed upon me, and a third pair snatching glimpses from the ambush of the pantry, I had to affect a nonchalance I did not feel. I was dying to look about. Everywhere was a great lot of beautiful things, and I mentally resolved to come in some day when the coast was clear of servants, and investigate my belongings. The possession of but few things has its advantages; one is lovingly acquainted with each. There is no need of a catalogue to find out what one has—an obligation often imposed upon the possessor of vast *choses de luxe*. It is not unlike the child wanting the whole cake and getting it, and being after all able to eat but one piece.

Jack's society, a fine dinner, and a little champagne, so rapidly restored my spirits that I soon forgot the servants with their merciless eyes, and talked away in reckless unconcern of undesirable listeners. A sudden sharp cough from Jack, and the lifting of his eyebrows, brought me to

an embarrassed silence. What had I been saying?—That I did not like either of his cousins, and Mrs. St. John the less of the two, and where were their husbands? They never mentioned them. Oh, it seemed that Mr. St. John was at a watering-place in Germany, for rheumatism, and Mr. Allison was in New York and in excellent health. How could Jack know that Mr. Allison was very well, having never inquired. Here the eyebrows went up. Oh, those servants! I had recourse to German. Jack responded very composedly in that tongue, that a foreign language would only be translated into unspeakable conjectures, and really I must change the subject of conversation as Lou's maid was our butler's sister. As I never could tolerate spies, I instantly resolved that Burton should be discharged. I had yet to learn of my limitations.

After the restriction put upon our discourse, I felt throughout the dinner constrained and rather provoked. While extremely attentive, Jack grew ominously silent, and I knew he wanted to prevent my talking if possible. By the time we had settled ourselves in his den, and his cigar was lighted, I had concluded there was some good reason for his reserve in the dining-room, and woman-like, yearned to know what it was.

"Jack," I said, earnestly, "what is the matter with Mr. St. John?"

"I told you, you curious kitten. He is at a cure for rheumatism."

"That's what you said. But the butler and the other man exchanged glances when you made that statement, and I saw the maid go into the pantry smiling."

Jack blew the smoke in rings. What comfort men find in smoke!

"How pretty you look to-night, dear."

I got up and walked over to the fire-place, where the gas logs were doing their make-believe-open-fire-act. I was very indignant.

"What's the matter, Dot?"

"You know very well. I don't care to be treated like a child."

Jack laughed provokingly.

"Then you mustn't act like one. And above all," suddenly in serious tone, "you must not let the servants' gossip or hints affect you. Remember, little one."

"That warning is not kind, Jack."

Jack immediately begged my pardon, saying he did not know what had made him so suddenly cross. I smiled a little for, if he were in need of the information, I could easily enough have told him that my question about Mr. St.

John had ruffled his natural composure. Nor was I through with the subject.

Persistency is one of my strongest characteristics. When I was a very small child I slipped off one day with some older children who were going swimming. Some one carried the news to Lame Ann, who flew to my father with the announcement that I had "Gone to be drowned." Father took the information calmly. "Don't worry, Ann. The child will swim." And so I did, after many trials. I was the last one home, still I had succeeded in what I had attempted, and until then I would not leave. Possessed of the same spirit, as soon as Jack was decently amiable I went back to Mr. St. John.

"Has he anything besides rheumatism, Jack?"

And Jack the imperturbable, answered:

"Not that I know of."

So for the time being, I gave up. It was one of the times that I failed to swim.

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The first morning at home began very brightly but clouded over somewhat when Jack announced that he must go down to the "Street." I had been so used to having Jack always with me, that I pouted very much at the "Street," and Jack left me with a rather severe, "It's upon business, little one. Good-bye."

Feeling very lonesome I went into the library to write to father. I had not finished the first page before the housekeeper knocked at the door. She came to ask if I had any orders about the meals. I said not at present. She could do as usual. It was a great relief to be rid of her. I had intended to tell her that the butler was to be discharged, but I could not muster the courage. Indeed, I have an unpleasant idea that the woman's inscrutable countenance might be interpreted "Unconditional Surrender" for her enemies, and at present I do not feel like evoking any more foes than absolute necessity demands—particularly in this case where I never in propriety could surrender.

Besides, Burton might not smile again—I mean out of season.

I wrote on industriously, and knowing that there were a great many servants in the house, I paid no attention to bells or footsteps or anything of the sort. Therefore it was startling to say the least when the library-door opened and I heard my name—not "Dot," but "Gretchen," and only one in all the world calls me that. Of course it was father.

The joy of that meeting, the delight of telling him all about our trip—everything, even the girl who copied the menus—the emotion at the sight of his emotion when I related the particu-

lars of our visit to his cousin, the Baron von Holtz, are not to be described in ordinary English. The twenty-four hours dear father stayed were like a happy dream. And his words at parting were a prophecy—

"You have much, Gretchen. Probably more than any lady of your line ever had before. Still, do not expect to find no thorns. There will be many, and you will need courage and tact. Never forget, *mein Mädchen*, who you are."

Father kissed me on the forehead a great many times, murmured a prayer in German—when pious, or extraordinarily tender or poetical, he always uses German—and entered the car as the train started.

Although Jack was with me, I cried. I wonder if I should have loved father less frantically had I had a mother?

Jack went from the station to Wall Street and I drove home alone. Pensive and quiet, deliciously sad, I entered the house. It would be very agreeable indeed to go upstairs to that lovely room and rest till Jack came home. The unaccustomed luxury of my new life is creating all kinds of new requirements. In Graytown I never needed rest beyond my sleep at night, while here I find that a certain amount of mooning is necessary for the maintenance of mental poise. It was with the most self-indulgent resolution of

doing nothing, that I reflected we had lunched early, on account of father's leaving, and I should have a long indolent afternoon to dream in before five o'clock.

Should I?

The cyclone struck me just within the door. It was dual, and rustled of silk. It was lowering and indignant although forcing some make-believe smiles.

"Why Dot!"—who told Mrs. Allison to call me Dot?—"How could you be so mean? Here the *Times* says Count von Waldeck has been visiting his daughter, Mrs. J. Worthington Woodward, lately returned from Europe, and you never sent us any word. We simply flew here, and are too late after all."

"I don't think you were a bit nice," drawled Mrs. St. John; "and who ever would have thought you were a count's daughter!"

I took a sudden resolution. I would not be rude to these women to-day. I would be overwhelmingly sweet, and myself take the initiative in questioning. I wondered why I had been such a simpleton the day we arrived. The situation seemed such a simple one now.

"Father was here to welcome me back," I said, angelically. "Crosson," to the man who still stood in the hall, "send Perkins for my wraps. Come into the library, cousins."

"But it's half-after-one, and we haven't lunched. Burton said he didn't know what time you'd be back."

Botheration! I should have to feed these women before I could torment them!

"Crosson," I added, the effort at self-control causing me to exceed Belle St. John's drawl, "tell Burton to serve luncheon for two."

"Three," corrected Lou Allison.

"Two," I repeated severely, as the man hesitated.

"Who is to fast?" asked Belle St. John.

"I lunched before I went out."

We went to the library—where Perkins immediately appeared. As she left the room, Belle St. John spoke, soon enough for Perkins to catch the words.

"It doesn't seem to disconcert you to have so many servants about. I fancied people had to get used to it."

"How many have you?" I asked, coolly.

"Oh, I board with Lou. I'm a poor relation and Lou is not very wealthy."

I scanned the clothes the woman had on and the diamonds upon her thin fingers. She is appallingly thin, even much thinner than I at first thought; still, without any possible shape, she contrives to be stunningly stylish. I believe Dr.

Holmes meant Elsie Venner to have that kind of a figure—snaky and writhing and fascinatingly graceful. What a clumsy dumpling am I beside Belle St. John!

"People's ideas of poverty must vary greatly," I said.

"Mine is abject, I assure you," asserted Belle. "You see, my dear little girl, Lou and I were brought up in this house by Jack's mother, who was our father's sister. Jack is exactly the same as a brother to us, and if Jack didn't pay for my gowns, I'd have to wear Japanese paper. Now, when the servants repeat these interesting facts to you, you won't be shocked—although I see you are at present."

I would not give in. That woman lying back in her chair with her eyes half-closed should not get the better of me. In spite of these resolutions my heart thumped with temper as I put the next question.

"Why doesn't your husband buy your gowns?"

Belle St. John started up into a straight, alert position.

"Who told you anything about my husband?" she asked, sharply, her drowsy eyes suddenly turned into flames.

"You are called Mrs. St. John, and Jack had not mentioned that your husband was dead."

"He's not dead," said the woman, excitedly; "I wish he were."

"Oh, Belle!" interrupted her sister. "How can you? You have made Dot deathly pale. Belle and her husband didn't live very happily, Dot, like lots of us, and he is at Wiesbaden for rheumatism."

The butler coughed at the door. We all three jumped.

"How long have you been there, Burton?" I asked, impulsively. Oh, yes, I have a great deal to learn. I am less than six months from Graytown.

"Just this minute, Madam. Luncheon is served."

Belle did not speak at the table. She had two hot spots on her cheeks, and kept Burton filling her glass with sherry, which somehow acted like rouge upon her face. Conversing with Lou Allison about Rome, I nervously watched Belle growing redder and redder. Lou seemed to know all the Italian nobility and was plainly disgusted that Jack had not taken me to call upon them. I told her we had made no visits except one, at my father's cousin's.

"Who is he?" she inquired, eagerly.

"Baron von Holtz."

"Oh, you really are of noble blood, aren't you? Jack never breathed it to us, and we'd no idea

of it. That article in the *Times* quite startled us. But how awful that your father had to be a music-teacher! They are such queer people, generally, with long hair, don't you know."

"Father is quite bald. And teaching has not changed his blood."

"Nor yours," laughed Lou Allison. "You're a spunky little thing."

My visitors departed immediately luncheon was over, leaving me oddly weary and listless, also doubtful of the compliment of having people come only for luncheon. Besides, to my unsophisticated mind, Belle St. John had had a great deal too much sherry, and I felt responsible.

It was almost five o'clock when a card came up to me. *Mr. Arnold Whitney Allison*—Lou's husband, undoubtedly. Quite nervous through curiosity, I went downstairs to meet this stranger.

Mr. Allison had been shown into the large drawing-room. He was standing as I entered, and instantly came forward. I do not know why I was so astonished at his appearance, as I had no possible reason for having any preconceived idea of him, except that he seemed so totally out of keeping with his wife. He was at least six inches shorter and three or four years younger than she. As for his manner, it was reserved, even diffident, and decidedly that of a gentleman. His face was pale, plain, very square-

jawed, and clean-shaven. Altogether he might have been very appropriately a clergyman—the kind that all the young girls of the parish would not fall in love with because he was handsome. Good looks and the Litany are a fatally touching combination.

"I am so glad you were at home, Mrs. Woodward," he said, sincerely, "because it's so much nicer meeting this way for the first time instead of at the dinner."

"The dinner?" I echoed, "I'm delighted to see you, but I haven't been asked to any dinner as yet."

"Then I've given away a secret. Mr. Woodward must have been planning a surprise for you. Whether you know it or not, you've cards out for a dinner on the twentieth."

We both laughed; I felt quite at ease and immediately liked Mr. Allison.

He talked well upon lots of subjects, in a quiet, attention-compelling way, and I found out that he played the violin "Just a little." Now father says that such people usually play exceptionally well. So I asked him to bring his violin next time. That made him laugh most heartily indeed. He said he would think about it.

I was sorry when he left. In fact I asked him not to go, at which he looked a trifle surprised, and explained rather elaborately that he

had another call upon his conscience which must be made before dinner. I judge it would have been more elegant not to have requested him to remain longer. But it had been so delightful to converse with some one who was not criticising me. Jack will have to coach me considerably before it will be safe to leave me alone in the intricacies of society's etiquette. Thus far the code seems to be "Say all that you do not mean —Nothing that you do." I felt so shy and embarrassed at the thought that I had made a mistake in Mr. Allison's case, that I forgot, as we said good-bye, to remind him to bring his violin the next time.

Jack came home earlier than I expected. As soon as his first burst of petting me was over I began to tell him of all his two cousins had said and done, as well as how very nice Mr. Allison was, and how I could not comprehend why he ever married Lou.

"Why, my darling," exclaimed Jack, who persists in believing I am an angel and is therefore proportionately shocked each time I prove I am not, "how cruel your small tongue is getting!"

"Now, Jack, I want to hear the whole story. How long did they live here, and when did they go, and *what is the matter with Mr. St. John?*"

Jack pulled his moustache and looked gravely at me as I sat upon his knee.

"You won't sleep well if I don't tell you, I suppose?" he asked, with a tinge of naughty sarcasm.

"No, I shan't sleep at all," I returned, defiantly.

"Well, Lou and Belle are the twin daughters of my mother's brother. Left orphans, and without means, my mother took them and brought them up as my sisters. Belle married St. John when she was nineteen. It was a desperate love-match, but St. John was a wild boy and no one approved of it. Between his riotous living and Belle's extravagance, they got into dreadful debt, and—ahem—St. John overdrew, you know, so he went to Europe for an indefinite period."

"Then he is a thief!" I cried, shocked, horrified.

"You musn't call it that, dear. Nobody in society does."

"But I don't want to be in society if such people are its constituents. And to think, Jack, that swindler's wife has been insolent to me! Why, my father would have starved in honor, and have seen me starve—"

"I know all that, my dear little girl," Jack interrupted, rather hastily. "All the world is unfortunately not like your father."

"What disgrace hangs over Lou?" I asked,

coldly, for I did not feel that he half appreciated my father.

Jack started.

"None, Dot. What made you ask that?"

"I am getting skeptical, that's all. She's older and taller and much giddier than Mr. Allison."

"Truly, dear, for a child brought up in the country, you are most precocious."

"The result of spending five months in the society of my clever husband. Jack, dear," I said, nestling into his shoulder, "you won't pretend Lou married him for love?"

"I never asked her, and she never told me."

"Oh, Jack, you are awfully unkind. Tell me how that match was made. I wager it wasn't in Heaven."

Jack sighed, shook his head at my incorrigibility and finally began in a resigned sort of fashion:

"Dot, it may seem strange to your youth and inexperience, but women often marry because circumstances cause marriage to be the most practicable and reasonable step. Lou had half-a-dozen offers while very young. She refused them, and was still single at twenty-seven, when my mother suddenly died. What could she do? I was a bachelor and she couldn't stay here. Naturally she went to her sister's, where Belle and St. John had not yet separated, but were leading

a most wretched life. A year later, when St. John's disgrace came, Allison stood ready to marry Lou and take Belle to her sister's home. It was only to be expected that Lou would accept him with gratitude—which she did."

"Oh," I said, in extreme contempt, "to marry a man for a home! I'd rather be hung."

"I believe you would, dear. Lou wouldn't, however—at least at that time," he added, thoughtfully.

"So all this is why you pay for Belle's gowns?"

"That's not the way to put it. It was my mother's request that I should make an allowance of two thousand a year to each of the girls. Needless to say, I do so, and I haven't the slightest doubt that every penny of it goes for clothes."

"Do you know, Jack," I asked, faintly, my face under the lapel of his coat, "that father and I and Lame Ann lived in Graytown on five hundred a year?"

"Dear little thing!" said Jack—The rest was not interesting—except for us two.

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Jack told me this morning that I must take the carriage and call on Lou and Belle. The request was not so awfully unwelcome, for I actually was longing to see the house where Lou and

Belle were so poor—How must their clothes look in an abode deserving that adjective? Quite like Cinderella's ball-gown in the step-mother's kitchen, I fancied.

I went down the steps of my own home as slowly as I could, to prolong the pleasure of gazing upon the beautiful, shiny horses with their harness glittering in the sun. I am finding lots of compensation for never having had much as a child and growing girl. The comfort and luxury are duly appraised as I meet them—always provided I am in the mental condition to be as it were two personalities; one who undergoes the experience; the other, who observes and enjoys the pleasure of the real participant.

The day I arrived in New York I enjoyed nothing, because after the ordeal at the pier I hardly seemed half an individual, let alone two. This morning, however, I was beautifully nerved up to appreciation of all the glories of my new existence, and when the footman put the fur robe over my lap and tucked in my feet, and then straightened up with his hand on the door, asking, "Where to, Madam?" I again thought of Cinderella; something like this was her emotion going to the ball. Having given Lou's address, the door slammed and the horses started and I slipped off my gloves to run my fingers deep into the lovely fur which seemed so comfortable and

light and warm on this cold, bleak day. Suddenly a disturbing thought of some poor old people in Graytown, who shivered all winter, flashed into my brain. Formerly, in poor little jackets grown thin from wear and brushing, and short because I grew taller, I often shivered myself; therefore I have a close acquaintance with the sensation and know how extremely unpleasant and miserable it is. People who have never been cold through want of sufficient clothing, cannot sympathize with the shivering. I made up my mind to ask Jack the minute I got home to send those old people some fur things like the carriage-robes.

The horses had stopped. It was in a street where fine old residences were being rapidly transformed into milliners' shops, dressmakers' establishments and Italian restaurants. I knew nothing of the former status of the neighborhood, of course, till I asked Jack later why Lou had taken a house where there were so many business-places. He told me the Allison family had lived in that house for forty years, and that for old homes to be turned into shops was only the general fate of lower New York. It seemed to me a vast pity.

A man in gorgeous livery answered the bell. His manner of absolute self-control at first stunned and then made me quite envious. Mrs.

Allison was at home; Mrs. St. John had gone out.

I was shown into a reception-room, dusty, uninviting and untidily shabby. Not poverty-stricken, like our rooms at home in Graytown, but worn and neglected-looking, although some of the things might have done very well if Lame Ann could have rubbed them up a bit. The floor was of hard wood, waxed in some remote period and since left to its own devices. The moving of chairs here and there had made it look something like the ice when the first boys have skated over it, only of course not near so clean. My eyes had wandered to the medley of pictures upon the walls, when Lou came down.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you! How funny to come in the morning! Still, you're a cousin, you know, and I'm glad you begin to act like one. Don't look at me, please, as my toilette is still to be made."

She had kissed me and pulled me down upon a couch beside her. I thought she looked exceedingly pretty in a long, loose, orange-colored satin thing with black velvet bows to tie it together. But at eleven o'clock in the morning!

"Jack told me to call to-day," I said, foolishly, "and he didn't mention whether I should go in the morning or the afternoon."

"Actually, Dot, your obedience is delicious!

I wonder how long you'll keep it up? But, candidly, you interrupted my breakfast. Would you mind coming upstairs?"

The house is what is called a "basement," and the drawing-room and the dining-room are upstairs. Astonished to hear that Lou breakfasted at such an hour, I asked her if she were ill.

"Oh, dear no!" she exclaimed, putting her arm about my waist as we went upstairs; "I went to bed at three and was making up my beauty-sleep."

"What kept you up so late?"

"Oh, that's not late. You'll be doing the same and worse. Wait, and we'll see. We went to the theatre and had supper afterward at Mrs. Layton's. That's all. Sit down, Dot. Have some coffee?"

"No, thank you."

Lou tasted some from her cup. She made a face, a studied one I think, for it was very becoming.

"Dear me! Stone cold."

She rang. No one answered. She rang again. Still nobody came. Then she rang furiously. When the man who had opened the door for me appeared, I expected him to be annihilated upon the spot. Lou merely told him to bring some hot coffee. He departed, grinning.

"I thought you'd scold him," I said, amazed.

Lou laughed. Her laugh was, against my will, making me like her.

"My child," she said, cheerfully, "you will probably never know what it is to owe a servant six months' wages. I do, and I know when silence is a necessity."

"You don't owe a servant money?" I was shocked.

"Don't I! The cook leaves this afternoon, my dear. I only owe her for two months, but she's canny and won't risk any longer. Davis is insolent and lazy, but he stays, Dot. I suspect that he's stealing the wine and selling it—still—another might do the same, you know, and expect wages in addition."

Lou rang again. This time Davis' appearance was instantaneous.

"More rolls, Davis."

"There are no more, Madam."

Lou flushed. The next second her laugh carried the incident off as usual. My head would have dropped; hers went higher.

"You may go, Davis," she said, calmly, to the man.

"It's well I'm going out to dinner, isn't it? You see I shan't need any luncheon, and my dinner is assured—cook or no cook, and nothing to speak of in the pantry."

I was at a loss, as Lou certainly appeared to be in earnest.

"How is Mr. Allison?" I asked, in the desire to change the subject.

Lou set down her cup and shook her finger at me.

"Yes, how? Dot, my husband has never flirted in his life. And he seems immensely taken with you. Beware!"

I flushed, drawing myself up most indignantly.

"Mrs. Allison, I am a married woman," I said, haughtily.

Lou shook with laughter.

"You are. And do you think that makes any difference? Why, my dear, single women don't get divorces, you know."

"But," I said, shaking over the insult, "you don't call any divorced woman a lady, do you? In Graytown we do not consider them even respectable. As for me, I am a von Waldeck, as well as Jack's wife."

Lou became suddenly very serious. Her slim index finger tapped the table.

"Dot, you must learn to be careful what you say. My own mother was divorced before she married Jack's uncle." A sort of defiant haughtiness was in the tone, and a strange tenseness appeared in Lou's bare, slender neck.

"I didn't know," I said, embarrassed. "If I

had, I would not have expressed myself to you. However, my feeling remains the same."

Lou suddenly relaxed.

"There! I shan't be angry with you. You're only a child brought up in the woods, after all. O-O-oh! Don't get excited again. Such temper in so small an individual frightens me. Come! Do you indulge?"

She had turned her chair about, and opened a drawer of the buffet. To my complete horror, she took out a silver box full of cigarettes and smilingly held it out to me.

"You're not in earnest?" I gasped.

The box held a match-safe. Lou lighted a cigarette, placed it between her lips and threw her head back, puffing rapidly.

"Turkish," she said, after a moment. "Just a trace of opium and so inexpressibly soothing."

She looked so pretty, so reckless and so totally unladylike, that between conflicting impressions —and stupidity—I was speechless.

"Does your husband approve of it?" I asked, at last.

"Don't know."

"But doesn't he smell it when you kiss him? I always know when Jack has been smoking."

Lou took the cigarette from her lips and burst

into the loudest laugh I had yet heard from her, although it seemed that she was almost always laughing.

"Kiss him!" she fairly screamed. "Why, I think Arnold would drop dead if I should do that. My little child, we haven't even shaken hands for more than six months."

"And yet," I said, tears coming into my eyes, "you seem so dreadfully happy and gay. Oh, how can you laugh at me so?"

I stood up, hurt, unhappy, insulted.

"Don't go. Please don't. You are so deliciously unusual. I promise not to laugh any more—if I can help it." She burst out again.

I knew I was right but I felt foolish and insignificant in the presence of her ridicule. We put as many false valuations upon ourselves as ever we do upon others. I did not exactly wish I were like Lou Allison, but I did wish, just then, that I did not care what other people did. I think I understand why Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" He probably felt that under ordinary conditions the question would be just and reasonable, the responsibility for one's own sins seeming to be sufficient for one's conscience to undertake, without the super-added doings or undoings of relatives and friends.

Lou was bright, fascinating, interesting to an uncommon degree. Why could I not be indif-

ferent to what she did? I had known her only a few days and began by hating her. And here I was bitterly regretting that I had dared to condemn something she did! The power of ridicule is stupendous, especially if the victim be a woman. No wonder the utmost penalty will be meted out to him who says to his brother, "Thou Fool!"

Flight seemed the only resource for my collapsing dignity.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Allison," I said, half-blind with mortification and tears.

Lou threw her cigarette away and was after me on the stairs.

"Please don't be angry, Dot. And I wanted to hear all about the dinner you're to give! Belle and I are getting new gowns for it."

"I'm not angry," I said, relenting entirely. "But I must go."

She went all the way to the door with me and kissed me good-bye. No matter what she may say or do, I cannot hate Lou Allison, although I want to.

Jack had told me that I ought to take a look at the shops—Sixth Avenue for lesser elegance and Broadway and Fifth Avenue for the places where swelldom is fitted out. So I told the footman I would take that drive. We went down Sixth Avenue—how clever of the coachman to

leave the choicest things for the end!—and the first place that fascinated me was a big confectioner's on a corner. They had in the window such charming-looking things filled with cream and piled up on a dish, that I immediately wanted some for luncheon. Accordingly I touched the little electric button and the carriage stopped. When the footman opened the door, he evidently thought I wanted him to go in and order something. I walked past him and into the confectioner's.

"I want all those cream things you have in the window," I said to the young girl in attendance.

She stared at me.

After a moment, "They're paper, Madam," said she. "We can have your order filled and delivered by four this afternoon. How many, please?"

I had recovered myself.

"Two dozen," I said, calmly, and gave my name and address.

As I did so, the portion of a black velvet hat that I had noticed behind the counter at the end of the shop, suddenly became a whole stylish creation, with a face beneath it. I could not move I was so surprised, for it was Belle St. John who straightened up and called to me.

"What are you doing here?—Don't you know

you belong at Sherry's?" She held a partially eaten bun in her hand and whisked some crumbs off her jacket with a pocket-handkerchief.

"I had an order to give," I returned, stiffly; "but what are you doing here?"

Belle bit into her bun.

"Having my luncheon. These buns are good and cost only five cents. They are also filling. Lou's cook is leaving and famine has begun to reign at home, while a prospective dinner this evening is too far in the perspective to allow appreciation of its proper proportions. Oh, don't look so astonished, Dot! Lots of the aristocracy come here to hide behind the counter and eat a bun. Look! Here comes a couple now."

Two pretty young girls, who greeted Belle by her name, had come into the place.

"Good morning," I said, hastily, and hurried for the door before Belle could get in any more. Perhaps it was wicked pride, but I did not want those girls to believe that I too had been behind the counter eating a bun. In our poorest days I never was obliged to snatch a meal in such a fashion.

"Home," I said to the footman. "I don't care about any more shops."

Jack found me cuddled up in a chair in the library.

"Jack," I said, wearily, reaching up to pull his head down close as he stooped over me. "I've learned so much to-day, that I think my head must be swelling. And Jack, how poor are the Allisons?"

"Oh, you dreadful piece of feminine curiosity! If you have a wild desire to know the amount of their income, Allison has ten thousand a year."

"And you give her two more," I cried, sitting up so suddenly that I bumped Jack's head. "Jack, I know two paralytics in Graytown who would starve and freeze to death were it not for the little that Uncle Dalton gives them each winter. Oh, won't you give them the two thousand?"

"My poor child, how excited you are! You shall have something for your paralytics, certainly. And still Lou need not be denied what my mother wished her to have."

"Oh, Jack, how good you are!"

"Have *you* been good to-day?" he asked, seriously. "Did you practice?"

I hung my head. There must be a frivolous, shirking streak in me somewhere, for since I have been here in this big house with all its novelty and distractions, I do not find my old ambitions troublesomely clamorous for attention. Had poverty not made discipline and self-denial imperative at Graytown, and lots of money and

no obligations been mine, I wonder if I might not be to-day a counterpart of Lou or Belle?

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It is the day after my dinner. I cannot say that the occasion was one of unclouded joy. First the women made me nervous, because their gowns, with the exception of one worn by a lovely young girl, were most shockingly abbreviated in the bodice, and I was the only one with any kind of a sleeve—and even my sleeves amounted to very little, being, indeed, what Lame Ann would call "Hardly worth the bother." When the first woman entered the drawing-room—a stout elderly creature with the tendons of her neck painfully prominent, as though the plumpness had receded from them like the tide when it goes down and exposes the skeleton of the pier—I fancied that her maid had left some kind of a string untied, and longed to tell her, only I did not know how to accomplish the hint with Jack and the woman's husband present. However, my idea of the untied string vanished when Lou and Belle arrived—or else more maids had been heedless that night. All the guests having come and about all the bodices being cut upon the same lines, I concluded that I was simply facing the fashion. Until then I fancied that only ballet-dancers wore such things. I had been

at a play once at the Town Hall in Graytown, and not one of the actresses had worn a gown made in a style to cavil at. So I concluded that the obnoxious people one heard about were the ballet-dancers. At my dinner last night I wished these New York society-women would take the actresses as an example.

In spite of their objectionable gowns, my guests had a vivacity, a self-possession and a grace, which I envied from the bottom of my heart. Two in particular interested me intensely. They were mother and daughter. The mother was the handsomest woman I have ever seen. Jack told me afterward that she is barely forty, although her hair is snow white; above her dark eyes and black eyebrows it is too beautiful for words, all soft and fluffy in a pompadour without any "rat" or curling-iron. The daughter is twenty, very tall and slender, with wavy black hair, eyes like her mother's, a lovely pale, high-bred face and a voice so seductive that one wants to hear her talk all the time. This she does not, seeming often *distraite*, and as if under all her serenity there was something troubling her. Her gown being much less decolletée than the others, I wondered if she was worried about the rest, as I was. Once while I was looking at her worshippingly, she glanced up, straight into my eyes. We both smiled, and I think that

each smile said to the other pair of eyes, "I love you."

I did not eat anything except one oyster at the beginning and one little frozen thing at the end. There were too many distractions. I confess besides that I was mortally hungry and might have eaten heartily had I known how to help myself to the complicated concoctions that were in such a matter-of-fact way presented at my left elbow. The array of knives and forks and glasses was paralyzing to my pathetically limited code, and I went wrong at the very start by putting the fish-fork into a poor little oyster. Looking up immediately in the most hideously frightened way to see if any one had observed, I met Mr. Allison's gaze. Had he glanced away I should have known that he felt guilty of having caught me in a break. What grand attainment to be master of such self-control! As I laid down the fork and pushed it under my plate to save it for the fish, I almost laughed aloud at an absurd recollection of our trip to the North Cape last August. We had stopped, about noon, at a little cottage that took the place of an inn, and were most hospitably invited to partake of the midday meal. The bare table did not surprise us, nor the wooden bowl full of potatoes boiled in the peel, which stood steaming in the center of the broad expanse of wood. We sat

down, expectantly, made cheerful by the host's encouraging smiles. But with each second, our cheerfulness shrank. Jack looked at me, and I at him. Finally convinced that plates, knives, forks, etcetera, were not forthcoming, Jack said to the interpreter, "Ask him how we are to eat them?" The question being duly translated, a beautiful look of unselfish pity at our ignorance overspread the Norwegian's face.

"Eat them, one after the other," he said, benignly.

That meal and my coming-out dinner might be used as the two extremes of civilized eating. One cannot call the Norwegian a savage, because he is a Christian, and has a house and bedsteads and a table. The episode of the fish-fork made me long for the primeval privilege of eating with the fingers, "one after the other," without further embarrassment than the limit of the number of potatoes in the bowl, or the stomach's capacity.

Well, I watched and I shall know better next time. I wonder what Lame Ann would say to vinegar and oil being served on sliced oranges as a salad, and to real roses sticking, frozen and dead, into each form of ice-cream! To my taste the poor, ill-treated flowers did not look a bit pretty, and they impressed me as having been martyred to a fashion invented for the pleas-

ure of dinner-givers who wanted to show they were so rich that money was no object. I intend to tell Mrs. Blackwell that I do not want any more dead roses served at my table.

The dishes in which these dead flowers were laid out for their obsequies, were of Venetian crystal and gold, and alarmingly extravagant both as to intrinsic value and probable destructibility, which under modern conditions means frequent replenishment. The dishes ridiculously directed my thoughts again to the Norwegian hamlet. We had supped at the house of the same peasant who had served us our dinner. Some friends of Jack's having overtaken us, eight sat down at the nicely-scrubbed wooden table. The repast consisted of black bread—whole loaves, to be cut held tightly against the chest of him who wanted a slice—and sour milk in blue-and-white china bowls. Blue-and-white china bowls! A provokingly illusive notion possessed me that I had previously encountered those identical blue-and-white china bowls under other circumstances.

"Wait a minute!" I cried, dashing abruptly from the table and up the narrow stairs to the row of small bed-rooms where travelers were accommodated. From one to the other I ran, finding the same object missing from each. Jack overtook me at the end of the row.

"Dot, darling," he gasped, "have you lost your wits?"

"No, Jack, only my wash-basin! Sh! Don't tell them, they're so hungry! Only please let you and me eat nothing but bread."

Burton accidentally clicking the bottle against my glass as he poured the champagne, brought me back to my elaborate dinner. I began to wonder whether I had sustained any considerable part of the conversation. The clicking of the glass seemed like a knell for the wasted opportunity of listening more attentively to the enlightened conversation about me.

There were a great many kinds of wine served, the women drinking most of the champagne. Belle St. John finished a bottle, if not more. I expected her to fall under the table, like one sees German students in pictures, but she acted no more, nor less, irrationally than she always does. How did she get used to it? I had half a glass of Burgundy, and a very little champagne. And I felt that my cheeks were unrefinedly red, and had an uncomfortable idea that I should not care to have father or Uncle Dalton see me.

I was sorry that Jack, who did the placing, put Mr. Allison so far from my seat at the table. He sat next the stout dowager, who talked of nothing except things to eat. Mr. Allison was rather plainer in evening than in ordinary dress. I still

liked him best, after Jack, although two or three of the other men were also nice. Lou Allison was looking wonderfully handsome, but she paid small attention to the man next to her. Her eyes were all for a young, good-looking chap, graduated from Harvard last year, who seemed quite as much interested in Lou as she was in him. He talked very well, if rather monotonously, of athletics and Boston-bull-terriers, upon which subjects Lou appeared to be very well posted; in fact, she and this Percy Earle kept up an uninterrupted conversation from the first course to the last. Lou seems to fancy young chaps, this boy looking even younger than Mr. Allison, who is barely twenty-six. Now Lou and Mr. Earle would never have taken my attention so extensively had I not discovered that the young girl with the lovely face and *distraite* manner, was greatly absorbed in watching and listening to the pair. I have forgotten to mention that the girl's name is Marion La Grange.

Jack had told me I must rise from the table before the coffee and take the ladies into the drawing-room. I felt quite like a lion-tamer in the circus as I went through the ceremony; it seemed so funny for me to control the actions of these gorgeous society dames. Passing Jack, he took my hand and said, in the dear German fashion, "Gesegnete Mahlzeit!"

"What's that you are saying?" asked Belle St. John, inquisitively.

"The German custom after a meal," answered Jack, "and one I happen to find very pretty. It's a mixture of piety and courtesy and means literally, 'God bless the meal.'"

"I think it's lovely," said Marion La Grange, as we entered the drawing-room. "You know I was educated in Germany, Mrs. Woodward; I am at home only two years."

Again we smiled into each other's souls. What had Lou Allison whispered to Mr. Earle as she passed him? I would wager my head it was not "Gesegnete Mahlzeit!"

Lou refused coffee; she, and all the others except Marion LaGrange, took the liqueur. Beastly sweet stuff to spoil digestion—Jack never touches it.

Removed from the stimulating presence of the men, my companions in the drawing-room appeared quite dull and sleepy after dinner, apparently not finding each other worth the effort of struggling against the lethargy induced by over-eating and drinking. Lou's voice breaking abruptly into a half-drowsy silence, quite startled the little group.

"Won't you play for us, Dot?" she asked.

I hesitated. Something told me that a hostess did not as a rule play to her dinner-guests.

"If you would," said Marion LaGrange, eagerly, "we should like it so much."

The girl's eyes had lighted up, and for her sake, I went into the music-room. I felt as if I had always known Marion LaGrange.

"Do you prefer piano or violin, Miss LaGrange? If you say violin you must accompany me."

"I should love to," she said, simply. She came and looked at some of the music and I noticed her exquisite white hands; they were like ivory made warm and mobile.

"Oh, will you play this?" she asked, suddenly.

It was Raff's Cavatina.

"Certainly."

If I played it as well as they said afterward, the girl's accompaniment had been the inspiration. I think there were tears in her eyes as she left the piano. If that girl is not in love, I never was. And I am sure it is with that athletic, Boston-bull-terrier Percy Earle! Pearls before swine!

My little thorn, probably the kind father had in mind when he warned me, was not wanting.

"Ah, really, very excellently played," said the dowager; "you, ah, gave lessons before marriage, did you not?"

"No," I answered, very evenly, "I only took

lessons, and father would find me still badly in need of instruction."

"Oh, ah, you are much too modest, I'm sure," she murmured, a bit confusedly.

"I hear your niece is getting lots of orders for her painted dinner-cards," said Lou Allison, in that sweet voice that stabs.

The dowager put up her lorgnette.

"My niece? I was not aware that she was looking for orders. I fancy you are mistaken." Annihilation for Lou was in the tone.

"Not at all," Lou returned, indolently waving her point lace fan. "She did those for Mrs. Woodward's dinner to-night."

"And how dainty and clever they were!" exclaimed Marion LaGrange.

There's a character worth having!

I told Jack when every one had gone, that I was once more in love. The dear old fellow looked a wee bit alarmed.

"Feminine gender, Jack," I added, consolingly patting his cheek; "it's Marion La Grange."

"She is very beautiful," he said, sincerely, "but not my type."

"Not only that, Jack. She's lovely besides."

"Yes, I think so. And a first-rate companion for you. Only you must not follow her enthusiastic footsteps in the direction of Guilds, Settlements and Improvement Clubs. Marion is some-

thing of an extremist, Dot, and altogether too uncommonly good for this world. She must have a wonderful constitution, for she keeps up with the giddy people at the same time. Her mother's a jewel. When I was a little boy I intended to marry her as soon as I was old enough."

"Because," I said, rather nonsensically annoyed, "you believed she wasn't too good for this world? Did you marry me because I was so wicked?"

"You little goose! Don't you know you're an angel? Only you are a healthy, comfortable sort of a one. And Marion—well, let me remind you of what I said at the beginning, despite her beauty and excellence, she is not my type. She is too full of ideals, and she will never condescend to love a mortal man."

"It was her mother you said you used to think of marrying."

"Yes, Dot, until I was thirteen, when the late Mr. LaGrange made her his wife. Still jealous?"

"I never was jealous," I exclaimed, with a vehemence born of guilt, "and as for Miss LaGrange—"

"Well, Dot?"

"Oh, nothing."

I was mentally coupling "Ideals" with the

chap who talked Boston-bull-terriers to Lou Allison.

* * * * * * *

I possess cases and trunks full of magnificent silver things that Burton appreciated enough to use in lavish profusion at the dinner last night. For my part I wish he had left them in their cases, for they came to the table in the hue of lead. Mrs. Blackwell may appear very elegant, very spick-and-span and all that, but I do not consider her at all above reproach in the manner in which she keeps this house. I have often longed to speak to her about dust in the corners of the stairs and in the draperies, and I confess that the woman's manner invariably overawed me at the last moment. I have mentally retreated from my belligerent position, indignant at my own timidity, while basely yielding to its demands.

However, the dinner settled me. What is the earthly use of having silver if it is not kept clean? I never could understand why Blackwell keeps ten servants to do the work of this house. So far as I can see, half of them do nothing but stand idly about while the house is dirty enough to cause social ostracism in Graytown. I deliberated well how I would go about the silver business. Again I am humiliated by

being forced to admit that once more my heart quailed before the image of Blackwell. I weakly determined to speak to Burton, the butler, and I decided to make my complaint while I was alone at luncheon.

"Burton," I began, as soon as I had eaten a few mouthfuls.

The man turned and faced me, wooden as the wall.

I coughed. He waited in his aggravating immovability.

"Burton." The words collapsed before this appalling figure of competent butlerhood. "Some bread," I said, mildly.

The bread was presented to me. Let me remark, in passing, that Burton only presents things. The man Crosson takes up the soiled plates, and a maid hands the things from the pantry. I wondered whether Crosson had the cleaning of the silver upon his shoulders. Should I speak to him? He was much younger and meeker, and less imposing than Burton.

"Crosson," I began. Then Burton, who had left the room for an instant, reappeared. "Oh, never mind, I was about to send you for Burton."

Burton came to my elbow. I had finished my luncheon and wanted nothing. The man stood expecting an order.

"Take up the plates!" I said, sharply.

Burton stepped back, stiffer, more wooden, more hateful than ever. He did not utter a word to Crosson. He merely made a slight gesture with the air of an emperor—a most fitting stage-emperor—and retired in dignified disgust behind my chair. I had made a break, which Burton would rehearse to the housekeeper. Upon the dessert plate which Crosson put before me lay a dull spoon and a dingy fork, silent witnesses that so far I had made no advance in the intended reform.

I ate in a sort of rage.

The coffee having been served, I gave Burton the nod which meant that he and Crosson might retire.

I sat sipping my coffee and thinking rather less happily than usual. From the silver my thoughts had strayed to my guests of the previous night: Lou, Percy Earle, Marion LaGrange. Lou's animated frivolity and subtly fascinating face; Percy Earle's absorbing interest in every word she breathed; Mr. Allison's stoical calm and studied propriety, and Marion's beautiful eyes and sweet young mouth under the shadow of some silent trouble. What a charm the girl possessed, and how clever she was! But Lou was also clever. Yes, clever enough to understand every bit of the harm she was doing. And what ailed

Allison? Was he made of wood or lead? Lead brought my mind back to the remissness of my servants in caring for the silver. Looking menacingly towards the pantry, between the panels of the screen I caught sight of Maria, the parlor-maid. She washed the dishes—probably she polished, or did not polish, the silver.

"Maria," I said, in my ordinary tone.

The girl fairly jumped. True, I had never before spoken to her, yet I had not fancied my voice could be so alarming.

"Yes, Madam," she said, appearing upon my side of the screen.

"I think you have charge of the silver, and I wish to say that it is very dirty, and must be properly cleaned to-day."

Maria opened her mouth and gasped, saying not a word.

I rose and left the room.

About four o'clock, as I was ready to go out, the housekeeper knocked upon the boudoir door. I thought it was Crosson to say that the carriage was waiting, and I did not turn.

"Yes, Crosson," I said.

"It is I, Madam," answered Mrs. Blackwell's voice.

At that I turned in amazement. Except for the official visit to me every morning at ten, I never saw Blackwell.

"Is anything the matter?" I asked.

The question was superfluous; her visage indicated as much trouble as anyone would care to encounter upon a single occasion.

"I never before found it necessary to come to a lady upon such a subject," she began, in her even, metallic tones, "and I'm sorry that so much unpleasantness has occurred. Maria feels so bad, and has cried all the afternoon; she can't get over it to be spoken to so sharply by a lady, which never in her life happened to her before. Allow me to say, Madam, that ladies leave the correction of their servants to their housekeepers."

"Have you quite finished?" I asked, my knees shaking and my hands growing cold.

"Only to say, Madam, that I can not possibly manage the servants, if you make it a practice to interfere."

Blackwell is very tall, and I felt, in spite of intense anger at her insolence, wofully small and helpless before her. With a supreme effort I gathered myself together, determined to crush her.

"You and Maria, both, may leave this afternoon. I have yet to engage anyone to give directions to me. You have made a mistake."

Instantly the woman changed. Her cold, severe face coarsened with common impudence.

"I'll see Mr. Woodward first," she said, sneeringly; "he knows better than to discharge a good housekeeper."

"You will pack and be ready to leave the house at six—you and Maria—I will pay you if Mr. Woodward has not returned before then."

Blackwell did not budge.

"Leave my room, if you please."

She went, muttering. Very dignified and commanding, I rang for Crosson to send the carriage away. Crosson gone, I took off my hat and jacket, and throwing myself upon the couch, burst into tears. Pride had enabled me to keep up appearances until I was alone, then this first housekeeping cloud settled upon me with incredible weight and darkness, and, like a hurt child, I longed desperately for Jack's return, to be commiserated in my trouble, and petted into forgetfulness of my deeply-wounded dignity. How different were Lame Ann's affectionate familiarity and innocent defiance, from the calculated disrespect of a "trained" New York servant! I sobbed violently, in a vortex of temper, pride and homesickness. It was all too much for me, the people, the habits, the formality, and the very servants in my house. At last I calmed down into a day-dream of leaving all this worry of things, and going with Jack to Graytown, to live in the house about which he had had the law-

suit. It was a jolly law-suit, because it had brought Jack to Graytown and to me. Besides, Jack had won.

I sprang up as I heard Jack's voice in the hall, and flew to him.

"Oh, Jack dear, I'm so glad you've come!"

"Glad! And with wet eyes? What is the trouble, darling?"

"No trouble—I shall not admit it is trouble. I have only discharged Blackwell and one of the maids."

Jack whistled. He went into the boudoir with me without speaking, and we sat down side-by-side upon the divan.

"Tell me all about it, Dot. Has she gone?—Blackwell, I mean?"

"Not yet; I gave them till six."

Growing constantly more dramatic and warmed up to my subject, I vividly rehearsed the Blackwell scene for Jack. He turned gratifyingly red when I repeated Blackwell's impertinent utterances, and said, "The wretch!" under his breath.

"Yes," I concluded, "she is indeed a wretch. I should never have believed, Jack, that any one could dare speak so."

"Of course, dear, she must go, unless she humbly apologizes, which I am sure she will do before six o'clock. She is an exceptionally clever

woman, and it would be unfortunate for my little wife if she had to look for another." Jack spoke slowly and judicially.

"You won't let her stay?" I exclaimed, both hurt and astonished.

"Not unless you consent to accept her apology. The trouble is, Dot, you don't know the conditions here. I heard a young chap this very day fairly wailing over his domestic troubles. He said his wife was ill in bed, and their two servants had run away before breakfast. The poor boy blamed the very rich, who can hire servants by the dozen and pay double the money which the thousands of others can afford. I hear tales every day, Dot, of people who can not keep servants for more than a week at a time, and who put up with anything if they can only get some one to come to them."

"I don't see what all this has to do with Blackwell!" I said, rising and going away from Jack.

"Simply this, dear. Good servants are painfully rare at the present time, and changing is a dangerous experiment. Most of them are lazy, impertinent and unreasonable."

"It can only be the fault of those who employ them," I said, emphatically. "Father often told me that as a rule people obtain the treatment they merit."

"True, Dot. The present conditions are the

result of the indolence and indifference of the women who will not bother about their houses. Now, listen, dear: I admit that Blackwell is often neglectful, and I admire you for noticing when the silver is dingy; however, you made a technical mistake. When things weren't up to the standard, it was my mother's rule to speak to the housekeeper, unless the fault was to be found about the service of the meals, when she called Burton to account. Be as particular and exacting as you can, Dot; only when fault is to be found, either Blackwell or Burton must be the recipient of your wrath."

I tapped my foot upon the wood floor.

"Why are you angry with me, Dot?"

"You admit tacitly that you are afraid of your servants."

It is well that Jack is not quick tempered, for I know I was exasperating as well as exasperated.

"I'm afraid of little Dot suddenly taking upon her untrained shoulders the responsibility of this household. Believe me, darling, you have no idea of the care and detail. Before my mother had Blackwell, she had a string of incompetent women as housekeepers. Chaos reigned and waste was everywhere. I am positive that Blackwell will come with an apology. No doubt your display of spunkiness did her good. Can you

not make up your mind to accept her contrition, and content yourself with being mercilessly strict in the future?"

I was neither pleased nor convinced.

"Jack, the independence ought to be on the side of those who do the employing and therefore hold the power."

"It ought? Well, my tiny philosopher, it's not now, and never will be till those who do the employing unite in exacting honest work for the wages paid."

"A Labor Union!" I cried, brightening. "No, not a Labor Union, rather an 'Employers' Union. Wouldn't it change things, Jack, if the wealthy women 'struck'? Think of the hundreds who would have to come to terms! I will join at once."

Jack laughed.

"Your idea isn't half bad, and it is certainly practicable. It is the old truth, Dot, 'In union there is strength.' In the meantime—"

A delicate knock interrupted us.

"Blackwell!" murmured Jack. "I shall withdraw."

I settled myself in state in a large chair, knowing that I always appear a good deal taller sitting down. My self-complacency suffered a jar as I caught sight of my red eyes in a mirror. Blackwell would have the satisfaction of know-

ing that I had wept, in addition to the fact that she had spoilt my drive. Once more my blood began to boil.

"Come in," I said, in a severe tone.

To my surprise, the woman had been crying. She held a damp, limp handkerchief between her clasped hands, and her inflamed eyes and nose put mine completely into the shade.

"Well?" I asked, shortly.

"I'm sorry, Madam, that I forgot myself, and I hope you'll reconsider my leaving. I'd not have spoken so, only the servants have been so trying of late, and I was all tuckered out by Maria's goings-on this afternoon. You can't know, Madam, what a life it is with their carelessness and tantrums and jealousies of one another."

Blackwell sniffled. My heart softened, and my figure relaxed a trifle from its indignant rigidity.

"You can stay if you want to," I said, quite mildly. "As for Maria, pay her and let her go."

"She's leaving, Madam, saying she wouldn't stay anywhere that she was found fault with in the dining-room. I'd like to stay, Madam, thank you."

An inspiration came to me. I might never again have Blackwell in this meekly-obedient attitude.

"Very well. But probably you ought to make

more changes than merely Maria. I am not at all satisfied with the neatness of the house."

The woman looked up, almost alarmed.

"I'll do my best," she said, "and I am glad to know I've a Madam who notices things, and appreciates when they're clean."

"You may be quite sure of that."

My erstwhile ogress bowed and retired.

Jack rushed in before Blackwell had well gone. I hope she did not hear him kiss me.

"Good little Dot! You've won the day. Blackwell will hereafter toe the mark. Wait and see!"

I am waiting. Recalling the haughtiness of Maria O'Flaherty I marvel where these Irish girls get it. All the von Waldecks rolled into one, could not approach Maria, as I addressed her after luncheon. Finally I put the question to Jack.

"What is it that makes an Irish peasant so imperiously self-assured?"

"Conceit, darling; it is always an exact equation of existent ignorance. It was Maria's stupidity that prevented her from appreciating the situation to-day. A clever person, princess or slave, is never disrespectful. Insolence is the usual accompaniment of brutal stupidity."

"For which," I added, gravely, "there is no cure this side of the grave. Thank you, Herr Professor."

* * * * * * *

DECEMBER.

JACK says he believes I am flying headlong into one of those insanely intense frienships of which women are occasionally guilty, and which commonly end in disaster. He has cautioned me against having my photograph taken with Marion LaGrange's head against mine, for he asserts that in every instance under his observation, that act has been the beginning of the end. I admit that I had contemplated one of those pictures, because it would certainly be effective for Marion to have blonde me against her fine dark hair and eyes. Jack's words, my protestations to the contrary, have unduly influenced me, and I have gone no farther than trying the effect in the mirror. It was truly very pretty.

I know I am very earthy, and had I never before realized my limitations, Marion would have brought them home to me. She has made a rule for herself that one half of her time shall belong to what she calls "Works of Charity", which works include all kinds of heroic occupations. She does not tell me much, save at times when I try to make an engagement with

her, when she murmurs: "Those hours are already devoted to something else." I have found out that she visits a woman with a cancer every forenoon except Sundays; that she has a "Christian Doctrine Class" for adults every Friday night; that she gives "Talks" at the Settlement three afternoons a week, and I know she teaches twice each Sunday at the Mission. I wouldn't even say positively that she does not do more. Mrs. LaGrange worries a bit, I fancy, although she has never complained, except one afternoon ~~she has never complained, save one afternoon~~ that I rushed to Marion's to get her to go somewhere with me, when Jack at the last minute could not.

"Marion is out, Mrs. Woodward; at the Mission again," said the dear, beautiful mother, sighing a trifle.

I was quite tired out from hurrying, and greatly disappointed.

"Doesn't Marion attempt too much, Mrs. LaGrange?" I asked, rather snappishly. Mrs. LaGrange took my hand and patted it.

"I hope not; she is very strong."

That evening I met Marion, and started to expostulate with her. She looked at me in her bright way, and laughed softly.

"Strange, Dot," she said, "but you make me feel like your mother. Were you awfully cross this afternoon?"

I concluded that upon the " Works of Charity " question we might get into trouble, and changed the subject. I love her dearly, and admire her zealous work, if only it did not make her look so preoccupied and set apart! She never seems thoroughly interested in the scenes about her, except when Percy Earle is present. My first suspicions are being fully confirmed. Let Mr. Earle enter the room, and I firmly believe that Marion forgets every work of charity which was ever performed since the world began. He has known her since she was born, and either does not notice her at all or treats her as might a rather polite brother. I get angry and jealous, while I try in all possible ways to have them see each other often.

We have an Opera-box every Wednesday night—unspeakable treat for one who was brought up with the Glee Club as the acme of musical dissipation! There was quite a lengthy argument before Jack and I made up the party for the initial Opera. My first clamor was for Marion, and Jack said I could not in decency leave out Lou and Belle the first night. Well, I should have to ask them. As for men, Mr. Allison, of course, and—I paused; I must ask Percy Earle for Marion. As I hesitated, meditating that Lou would be present, Jack himself suggested Percy. I agreed at once, then

remembered that there would be four women and three men. Jack did not see the difference that made.

"You're going to the Opera, not a dance," he said. "Besides, lots of men will be floating in to call upon you."

After some argument, Jack proposed the Robertsons.

"Another man, indeed, Jack, but another woman, too."

Jack groaned.

"How you women love each other!" he said, provokingly.

I maintained an injured silence.

"Ask a dozen more men, Dot, if you find them so amusing," he continued, seeming to enjoy my displeasure; "only if I were you, I should first ask the ones we have proposed, and see who declines."

"It will surely be a man," I said, gloomily; "perhaps Mr. Allison won't go."

"Why not?"

I did not know why not, and said nothing—at least I could not explain lucidly.

Belle St. John was the one who declined, to my vast satisfaction. We would be a comfortable six, I reflected, without one lonely extra woman to upset the social symmetry.

As things came about, we were a most un-

comfortable six. Mr. Allison was impartially nice to Marion and to me; so was Jack. Percy Earle, whom I invited only for Marion's sake, paid no attention to her whatever; instead he sat at the back of the box, and leaned devotedly on the top of Lou's chair. Both completely ignored the music, and kept up a constant conversation in under-tones, while Marion listened religiously to the singing of Faust and Marguerite, and grew steadily more listless and more the exact match of her dead-white gown. I could have been rioutously happy in the *entre acte* which brought five of Jack's nicest men-friends to pay me their compliments, if Marion's dejected figure, (her elbow on the rail of the box, and her chin abstractedly sunk into her palm,) had not reproached me every time I laughed. Percy Earle stood up to greet the men, all of whom he of course knew. When standing he kept close to Lou. I think Marion makes a bad mistake in moping so steadily. I am sure I should not; if Jack had liked some other girl in Graytown better than me, I would have pretended not to care a rap for him, and would have laughed and talked with other people, though I strangled in the attempt.

Not that I mean Percy is aware Marion is unhappy over him—not in the least. The simpleton is deaf and blind so far as Marion is con-

cerned. As for Lou, while I feel in conscience bound to despise her, alas, I cannot! She struck me last night as very much like sin, which we ought to hate and do, at our prayers, to greet it lovingly whenever temptation is strong. Lou is so winningly pretty—such a terribly attractive, dainty sort of a devil!

Mr. Allison amazes me. Surely he sees how Lou is carrying on, and apparently he is indifferent. Oh, I hope Jack would be raving jealous if I ever gave him an excuse!

The women at the Opera wore the same kind of gowns as did my dinner-guests. I should like to get the opinion of some bright boy of fourteen or fifteen upon them; it would doubtless be impartial and original. I know this much: if I were a boy growing up, I should never respect my mother if she went out in such clothes. Fancy if lightning or something struck this Metropolitan Opera House, and all these grinning, scheming, shockingly-dressed women suddenly sat stark and stiff! What ghastly judgment—to die in those outrageous bodices and shoulder straps!

At about the middle of the second act, there was a stir in the box next to ours—Mrs. Van Voort's. She had the Robertsons and a couple of English girls as her guests. The English girls were nice, slim, blonde things, speaking in melo-

dious voices, and gowned in extreme simplicity. Mrs. Robertson looked stouter and uglier and redder than usual, in a sky-blue panne velvet costume. She stood out in unpleasant prominence by reason of the young girls who sat on each side of her. Her husband, a quiet, stern man of fifty, very Scotch and very proper, was almost invisible from his chair back of her. The Van Voorts are a young, giddy pair, quite devoid of intellect, contemptuously rich, and bound up body and soul in "having a good time." Belle St. John is the almost constant companion of Mrs. Robertson, while Mrs. Van Voort frequently fills out the triangle. All the party left before the last act, probably not finding much of a good time in seeing Marguerite die. Lou Allison and Percy Earle had spent one *entre acte* with the Van Voorts. There had been lots of laughter, and rather loud talking until the lights went down again; and Mr. Robertson, who sat prim and stiff while the rest were in the little ante-room, very audibly commanded his wife to come back to her place and listen to the music.

Lou returned looking rather flushed, and slipped quickly into her seat. A moment later, she leaned back and resumed her mumbling with Percy. I think Mr. Allison fidgeted a little. Jack was frowning, and once I saw portending temper in his face. Jack loves music, and that

disturbing whisper was too irritating even for his colossal patience. I vowed to myself that never again would I invite Lou to my box; this first vow was followed by a second: In the morning I would see Lou Allison, and tell her plainly how wicked and cruel she was.

Mr. Allison put on Marion's wrap, and I heard him exclaim at her pallor. She laughed and said she was ridiculously well. Meanwhile tears were in her eyes.

Mr. Allison's manner as he spoke to her, was a surprise to me. All along I have been quite under the impression that he, so matter-of-fact and even, must upon general principles disapprove of idealistic, unworldly Marion. Standing there fastening her cloak, he might have been a very venerable father, gravely solicitous for a young child's health. He is only six years older than Marion, and I marveled that he could seem so far removed from men of his own age, who would approach the girl as admirers or lovers. "How unfortunate that such a man has no children!" I found myself thinking; and I laughed irrelevantly, at the immediately answering thought, "What would Lou do with a child?" The hideousness of calling a widow's children "encumbrances" would be nothing against the actual fact of what fearfully great encumbrances Lou's possible children would be.

Unfortunate little beggars! They would most probably not have even a Lame Ann.

Jack catching sight of poor Marion's dewy eyes as Mr. Allison considerately turned away, slightly frowned.

"What a pity," murmured he to me, "that Marion lets the unreality of an Opera affect her so much, and is hopelessly cold to the actual humanity about her!"

Oh, Jack! And still I know he is awfully clever.

We had the bus take us to Sherry's after the Opera for supper, and were joined there by the Layton party of eight, consisting of Mr. and Mrs. Layton, three débutantes, and three beardless boys. The full grown young women of eighteen or nineteen seemed immensely entertained by their youthful cavaliers, who, being all between seventeen and eighteen, were about on a par with girls of twelve or thirteen. If giggling be a safe indication, the six young people were perfectly satisfied. About every sentence the boys uttered contained a "Yale man" or a "Harvard man", or a "Princeton man", so I was forced to conclude that the very word "man" was delicious to the children's tongues.

A ludicrous picture flitted through Sherry's, a kind of a mirage, of Lame Ann thrashing a

boy, fully as old and a great deal bigger than any of these, because he had drowned my pet kitten.

I suppose starting out with the attentions of lads, leads to marriages like Lou's. Fancy! When Lou came out into society, Arnold Allison was a child of fourteen. And now he is her husband. It is nauseating! I am so glad I married a big, strong man, lots older and cleverer and wiser than I. How can a woman expect to be shielded and petted and waited upon, when she is the much better man of the two? Shakespeare was right, as ever, when he made the Duke in Twelfth Night tell Viola, "Let still the woman take an elder than herself, ...For women are as roses, whose fair flower, being once displayed, doth fall that very hour."

I am eighteen and Jack is thirty-five. I hardly think I shall fade so fast as to catch up to him.

I admit that Lou is exceptional. More is the pity! She does not look so very much older than Marion LaGrange; and I am not so dull but that I can understand that for the woman of thirty to look like the inexperienced girl of twenty, makes the situation a perilous one. Would Percy Earle be infatuated with a faded, wrinkled-up woman? I am positive he would pass her by.

The Layton party infused some needed vivacity into ours. I do not mean that we found

either the giggling or the conversation about "man" inspiring; only that some kind of pride seemed roused in Marion after the addition of these people to our party, and she talked animatedly for the rest of the evening. Percy Earle, whether brought to himself by Mrs. Layton's sharp, cold eyes—she is his sister—or afraid of a later outburst from her sharp, cold tongue, left Lou's side and sat dutifully next me. Truth compels me to state that Lou sulked visibly after Percy left her. Oh, how I would talk to her in the morning!

We took Marion home with us, I having arranged with Mrs. LaGrange to keep her a day or two, except of course, when she would be out upon her "Works of Charity."

In the morning, soon after breakfast, my manner no doubt somewhat shadowed by painful self-consciousness, I told Marion I was going to walk. She might practice while I was away, I added, feeling bound to provide occupation for a guest. Marion serenely checkmated me by remarking that she had something to do, and I remembered the cancer woman and how superfluous would be any effort to keep Marion employed. We parted affectionately, and I hastened, still tingling with indignation, to Allisons', bent upon telling Lou what I thought of her.

Unfortunately she was out. Would I see Mrs. St. John?

Considering that Lou might return directly, I went up to Belle's room, that lady having sent word that she could not receive me anywhere else. I found her in bed, her hair tousled, her eyes dull and sleepy under swollen lids, her prettiness all wanting.

"Morning!" she drawled, from the pillows. "I'm not up yet, as you see. Annie," (to the servant who was hastily straightening up the room), "let things alone and get my breakfast."

"Where is Lou?" I asked, abruptly.

"I'm sure I don't know. Do you contemplate murdering her, or what? You look so fierce! I haven't seen Lou since before dinner last night, so as Mrs. Robertson told me you had her in your box, you must have more recent news than I. I've heard all about your levée; Mrs. Robertson said you looked glorious, and were fully capable of flirting with half a dozen men at a time. Jack will have more than he bargained for in you, I'm thinking."

Belle could no longer make me angry, as she did six or seven weeks ago; I calmly ignored her remarks.

"Did you see Mrs. Robertson so late last night? She left the Opera before the last act."

"I saw her about three o'clock this morning,

Dot. Oh, it was a tight little game, and I kept on playing, hoping to win. I wonder what time I tumbled into bed?" Belle closed her eyes for a moment as though earnestly endeavoring to calculate at what hour her previous day had ended.

"Don't you know?" I asked, astonished in spite of myself.

"Haven't the slightest idea. I sat considering ways and means of paying my debts, until I heard the milkman."

"Why did the recollection of your debts suddenly overwhelm you in the middle of the night, Belle?"

Belle yawned.

"Well, you see I wasn't so badly off the first hour. The game went well enough at first. See here, Dot, lend me some money, won't you?" There was an unwonted briskness in the question.

"What game are you talking about? Lou said you were engaged for a card-party, but—you don't mean to say—" I broke off miserably.

"Only poker, that's all. I prefer it to bridge. Ever play? Jolly sport. It's the only thing which keeps me from suicide—Yes, Annie, right here."

The maid had returned with a tray. She had coffee, bread and butter and a decanter with

glasses. Belle picked up the decanter, and filling a glass, held it silently out to me.

"No, thank you," I stammered, a confused medley of Belle, whiskey, poker and debts buzzing in my brain.

Wasting no words, Belle put the glass to her lips and drained it, following the undiluted stuff with a little ice-water.

"What makes you look so queer, Dot? It's nothing but innocent, good whiskey—an appetizer."

I once heard Uncle Dalton say that the shoemaker in Graytown was "hopelessly gone", because he drank "raw whiskey before breakfast."

"You don't do it every day, do you?" I asked, in down-right alarm.

"I couldn't eat if I didn't, and you wouldn't expect me to exist upon air, would you? Your expression makes me weak, Dot; I need another bracer, if I never did before."

Again the glass was filled and emptied.

"I suppose you will tell Jack all about it," said Belle, beginning to eat, "but you'd better not, because you don't know how soon you'll have to begin yourself. How do you suppose women stand the strain of a winter in New York? Why, we just couldn't if we didn't help ourselves along with a bit of whiskey or sherry, or

crême de menthe at the proper moment. I went to a luncheon and five teas yesterday. Then a dinner, and lastly our poker game. That reminds me, Dot, can you lend me two hundred? I owe it to Mrs. Robertson, and she needs the money to pay for a new tea-gown. The dressmaker is dunning her every day, and Robertson is as mean as Moses—or the Scotch, which, amounts to the same thing."

"I never knew women gambled," I said indignantly, "especially women who think they are ladies."

"Whew! There aren't any ladies now-a-days, except wash-ladies and scrub-ladies. And, judging from you, angry ladies."

"I'm not angry. But I will not give you money for gambling."

Belle put back the dishes, shook the pretty lace ruffles down over her hands and leaned back against the pillows.

"I have heard," she said, musically, "that the Germans are as stingy as the Scotch."

"They are certainly stingy of their good names," I returned, with considerable anger, "and respectable women do not get themselves into debt, least of all gambling debt."

"Dear me, what a temper you have! Dot, try to work up a crumb of compassion in your tiny personality, won't you? I need two hundred

dollars awfully, and I know you can spare it if you want to."

I do not know how rudely I might have answered had the maid not again appeared, looking disrespectfully cognizant of the situation.

"Mrs. Robertson is coming up," she announced, exultingly. "I tried to keep her down, but she said she had to see you, and ordered me real sharply to get out of her way."

"You'll excuse me under the circumstances," I said, coldly.

"Oh, don't go!" cried Belle, starting from the pillows, her indolent manner changing into one of acute anxiety, "for Heaven's sake don't! She's come for her money, Dot, and I haven't it."

"That's not my fault."

"It is," exclaimed Belle, excitedly. "Say you'll send a messenger boy with a check, won't you? I shall tell her that I will pay her this afternoon."

Mrs. Robertson was sweeping along the hall; Belle dropped back upon the pillows, and hastily pushed from her the tray, which the maid, who had heard the latter part of the conversation, carelessly picked up. She went out one door as the caller entered the other. The bow and "Good morning," Mrs. Robertson bestowed upon me were so curt that I longed to tell her she

need not be at all put out, as for my part, I could not get away too soon. Distantly enough I returned her salutation, recollecting that this unrefined, over-dressed woman had spoken of me as an "Upstart." I murmured a "Good-bye" intended for Belle and her visitor, and was hurriedly leaving when Belle called,

"Aren't you going to kiss me?"

Turning back in surprise, I stooped over the bed, dimly conscious that Belle had been rude to me, and might wish to atone before I left.

"You'll send me the check," she breathed into my ear, holding me tightly as I kissed her.

Disgust overwhelmed me. I stiffened and pulled myself away. How easily I had been flattered!

"No," I said, very audibly, "I won't. Good-bye."

"How red and cross the small person looked!" I heard Mrs. Robertson say, as I went down the stairs. I had a strong impulse to go back and tell her why.

Davis let me out. He and the maid, Annie, had been whispering and giggling in the hall. I wondered whether they stayed in the house without wages for the sake of the entertainment their employers furnished them. Vicariously mortified, I made my way home to my beautiful, transcendental Marion—who had not yet returned

from her cancer friend. I was unreasonably provoked at her, as I dressed for the luncheon at Mrs. Layton's to which we were both going. Marion came in when the brougham was at the door.

"If I could only go in this!" she said, regretfully, pinching her serge sleeve. "But I shall be ready in ten minutes. I was so unexpectedly detained," and she laughed as she rushed upstairs.

"Most charmingly inconsiderate of you," I called after her, still cross and out of sorts with all the world.

"Oh, I'll tell you," came from the upper landing, "you and you only."

She laughed once more, and I wished I felt so gay.

Actually within ten minutes she appeared in regal elegance, not flushed, nor breathless, nor at all ruffled. Between chagrin at not having met Lou, and anger at the outcome of my visit with Belle, I was ugly enough to snap at even Jack himself, but by the time we had turned the corner, Marion's calm good-nature had subdued me.

"Hurry up with what you have to tell me, dear," I said. "It's not far to Laytons'."

Marion looked at me mischievously.

"I had a proposal, Dot—on the stairs of a

tenement-house. Oh, I know it's wicked to laugh."

"It is," I said, severely, "horribly so. Love is an awfully serious matter, Marion LaGrange, and you ought to know it."

It was cruel to say it, and I hated myself as the girl turned deathly pale. No suspicion of laughter remained as she said, slowly:

"You are right, Dot. It is wrong even to tell you."

I was disappointed, being only a woman.

"That is as you think best," I managed to say.

"You can advise me what to do, and I'd rather tell you than mother." She hesitated.

I smiled encouragingly. Marion resumed:

"It's the curate of St. Clara's. Do you like him, Dot?"

"No," emphatically, "I detest him. Not a single thing about his profession suits his character except his cassocks. He was meant to go round in skirts like a woman; so they're most appropriate."

"Oh, now you're wrong, Dot. He's intensely devout and earnest—"

"And a flirt, and he fibs whenever a fib is convenient," I continued, "and altogether I despise him."

Marion looked downcast.

"You evidently don't think his asking me to marry him much of a compliment, do you? Well, he did, on the stairs, where I met him going to call upon the sick woman I was leaving. I was so astonished that I only said 'Oh don't!' and bolted for the street, and he ran after me, Dot—"

Here the ludicrous overcame Marion again, and she broke off laughing.

"It was quite like him, Marion, and I should be wild if you cared for him. He's a perfect ninny."

"Oh, Dot! I kept running till we reached the corner and then I noticed that some small boys had joined in the chase, and I felt what a spectacle I was making of myself, and how foolish I was, and stopped and tried to gasp out an apology."

"Well, what else, dear? Here we are."

"He said if I persisted in saying, 'No,' he would go West, and might give up the ministry." Marion looked awed.

"Let him do both, and welcome, Marion. But he won't. He is not cut out for heroics. What presumption to expect to marry you!"

We were going up the steps. Marion sighed deeply.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, in a suddenly weary voice, "I'm by no means irresistible."

At that moment I could have shot Percy Earle.

The luncheon was an over-decorated, over-long, over-dull affair, where I ate more than was comfortable, for the want of something better to do. Mrs. Layton is always fretting about something or other, and entertained her guests by disjointed bursts of the probability of various minor calamities, such as catching cold at the Opera; the children looking red and very likely being in for the measles; and so on, quite like a genuinely uneducated farmer's wife. Her birth and breeding have done little for her, except to give her a clear-cut face—a good deal like Percy's in miniature—in which all expression is lacking except chronic peevishness. She has a pitifully attentive husband, who thinks she is the most beautiful part of creation, and humors her to the verge of downright weak-mindedness. If he should dare call his soul his own, she would cow him into immediate apology by reminding him of the care of her "five helpless children"—whom she hardly ever sees. These pretty little things are the jolliest scapegoats, and unconsciously bear all their mother's shortcomings upon their innocent golden heads. No subject is too irrelevant or far-fetched for the "five helpless children" to have a bearing upon it. I once heard Mr. Layton suggest that another hat might be more becoming to his wife. With a flash and

a quiver Mrs. Layton flayed him by demanding how any woman with five helpless children could take the time to select the proper hats? It was all I could do not to whistle. Belle St. John has frequently explained the whole situation by remarking, "Oh, it's because Addie Layton has all the money."

Still, I do not think Jack is the head of the house because he has the money; he is the master because he is a man, not a Miss Nancy.

These thoughts were all very contemptible while I was sitting at the woman's table; the trouble was that when I reproached myself and tried to think of other matters, I was haunted by Belle St. John and her gambling, or worse yet, Lou Allison and what I meant to tell her about the affair with Percy Earle.

I left the minute I could decently do so, determined to see Lou before dinner, if I had to drive over half of New York. Marion stared a little when I told her I would leave her at the house and would then go somewhere alone.

"Why did you ask me to stop with you, Dot?" she asked, only half-jesting. "I seem a good deal in the way."

"Not at all. You didn't take me to your sick woman this morning, did you? And I wasn't angry. Run along, dear, I'll soon be back."

This time Lou was at home. My satisfaction became limp when I discovered she was not alone.

A thin, starved-looking individual was talking most industriously to her of the great advantages to be gained by subscribing to a new periodical. Lou appeared more than bored, and fairly sprang to meet me.

"Oh, Dot, I'm so glad to see you. I'm going out with this lady," she added, glibly to the canvasser, "so you'll excuse me."

The gaunt young woman stood up, her long face growing longer and her golf skirt falling in lines verily suggestive of a "driver," while her eagerly thrust forward neck and head finished the simile most appropriately.

"But the subscription?" she almost squealed. "Four dollars a year, and the most delightful illustrations." Here she began flirting the leaves of an ungainly-sized magazine. "Perhaps this lady—"

"Oh, yes," I said, sympathetically. She looked so hungry and disappointed! "I haven't any money with me—"

"Only the name and address, Madam. Thank you ever so much," as I handed her my card. "So very kind of you. And if you will recommend the publication—"

"We're extremely pressed for time," interrupted Lou, "and we'll recommend you to everybody."

Her fibs were brazen, but before I could remark

upon the matter, Lou burst out angrily, the canvasser being barely out of hearing.

"It's another part of Davis' impudence! He sent that creature upstairs simply to annoy me. I couldn't insult her because the curate of St. Clara's gave her my name."

"How could Davis know you wouldn't receive her?"

"I never see any canvassers, and he knows it. I haven't time nor money for them."

"Can Davis recognize a canvasser?" I asked, mystified.

At home in Graytown we had been always delighted to see one, although it was hard that most of the time we could not buy anything. Lame Ann used to say they were lots more improving than a daily paper, and going generally round to the back-door where the women were busy, they could tell her exactly what was doing in every house in the village.

"Certainly," was Lou's impatient answer; "didn't she have a bag? And her voice, and clothes! Oh, everyone knows a canvasser."

"You seem out of sorts, Lou."

"Oh, I've business on hand—serious legal business. I may have to go West again—where I was all summer. I believe I am both tired and cross. And I don't feel like a long railroad journey."

The laugh and recklessness being so conspicuously absent, I rather wavered in my determination of lecturing her, when she seemed in trouble already. What legal business could Lou have in the West?

"What is it, Lou?" I asked, anxiously, "is anything wrong?"

"No, no, nothing at all—or everything, if you please; it depends upon the way one regards the subject. Oh, the deuce! Don't look so glum, Dot."

Surely I could not look so glum as did Lou herself.

"I came here to scold you, Lou, and if you're in trouble I don't want to." Thus I made audible the vacillation between duty and sympathy.

Lou opened her eyes and mouth; then her saucy laugh pealed forth.

"Scold *me?*" she cried, and coming closer to me she shook me. "For Heaven's sake, begin. It will be the jolliest sport I've had in weeks." Her great eyes laughed a challenge into mine.

"I'm in dead earnest, Lou—" I began.

What an unlucky day! Davis stood at the door.

"Mr. Earle to see you, Madam."

Lou started, and I started much more.

"Show him up," she said, sharply. As soon

as Davis had disappeared, she caught my hand as I moved backwards.

"You're not going, are you?" she questioned, eagerly.

"Decidedly, yes; I didn't come to hold a conversation *a trois*." I myself was surprised at the bitterness of my voice.

"Dot, please stay; I beg you not to go."

I stared at her.

"Let go my hand, Lou; you hurt me."

"Dot, stay," she whispered, insistently. Percy's step was already upon the stairs.

"No, I won't," doggedly.

"An unexpected pleasure," said Percy Earle to me, his face not at all confirming the words.

"I was just leaving, Mr. Earle. Good-bye, Lou."

She gave me an imploring look as our eyes met, and so great is Lou's influence over me that it was only by an effort of the will that I got away.

Going home I cried. The day had been one of excitement and strain, and my nerves are by no means what they were a year ago. I longed unspeakably for Graytown, as I had so often done during the past month. Suddenly I laughed aloud. To be implored to remain twice in one day in the same household, was a very comical experience. The laugh died away as I wondered wretchedly

whether I had done wrong in leaving Lou. Her beseeching eyes remained with me, and the recollection was almost as potent as Lou's actual presence. What had I to do with her reception of visitors? Lou was old enough and worldly enough to manage her own affairs. Had she not been mercilessly ridiculing me when Percy was announced? I sighed in despair.

Arrived at home, my eyes proved considerable of an embarrassment, for I had no plausible explanation to give Marion, and I hate to be mysterious. I was laudably endeavoring to look pleasant as I entered the hall. Alas! My ill-luck seemed to have come to stay. From the music-room came the notes of two violins, and clever as Marion is, she could not play more than one at a time! Crosson's polite murmur to the effect that Mr. Allison had come in half-an-hour ago, was quite unnecessary; I knew at once that he and Marion were playing duets. Already over-wrought and upset, the situation acutely annoyed me. Here was Lou's husband playing duets with a young girl at my house, while his wife was simultaneously entertaining in her drawing-room, the young man with whom this girl was in love! A man would have sworn; I vented my emotions by a dash upstairs and a few sharp words to Perkins about not having my dinner-gown out. This was most unjust and

foolish, as it was barely five o'clock, and yet I do not know but what venting oneself upon the Creator of heaven and earth is even worse.

"Will you dress at once, Madam?" asked Perkins, astonished.

"No, no, did I say so? Just fix my hair."

I waited a good while before I went downstairs.

"Oh, we're so glad you've come!" exclaimed Marion. "Do please play the piano part of this."

I consoled myself instantly in regard to my appearance. Both she and Allison were wholly absorbed in the music, and would give no attention to the condition of my eyes. Even enthusiasts are practically useful at times.

"Dot!"

It was Marion, her bow suspended in air, her eyes lit with indignant reproach.

"Do you know we are playing Händel's Largo?"

"In the tempo of a waltz," supplemented Mr. Allison, laughing at my dismayed countenance.

"I'll try to do better," I said, meekly. "You must excuse me, but my mind was upon other things."

"So it appears," returned Mr. Allison, dryly. "You are far too free from care, Mrs. Woodward, to fall readily into the slow, sad measure of this."

It is a relief to know that I am becoming successful in hiding my feelings.

* * * * * * *

Quite early this morning Belle St. John came to see me, to Jack's surprise, as he knows her usual hour for breakfast.

"What's wrong, Belle?" he asked, as he shook hands, and added he was about due at his office.

"Nothing, Jack. Got up early, perhaps, or maybe didn't go to bed at all."

Jack was putting on his gloves, and frowned ostensibly at the clasp, but in reality, at Belle.

"Allow me to remark, my dear girl, that you look more like the latter. You're not taking much care of yourself, Belle."

"And nobody cares," she sang, recklessly. "Good-bye, Jack; run along. It was Dot I came to see."

"I hope she will teach you some manners," he said, rather severely; "and Dot, make her eat some breakfast. I don't believe she has had any."

Now I had an appointment at the dressmaker's, and as soon as Jack had gone and Belle had shortly declined my invitation to the dining-room, I rather jubilantly announced the fact.

"At Mme. Blanchesi's?" asked Belle, relapsing into her indolent manner.

"Yes."

"Well, I'll go with you. I want to see what she has. Anyway, I must have a talk with you, and we can talk as well in the carriage as here."

There was no way out of it. I had indeed been a dull diplomat when I proposed the dressmaker to a woman like Belle. Ungraciously enough I sat down beside her in the brougham, and, stubborn and cross, waited for her to speak. A mighty sigh was the first indication that Belle's heart was heavy. I gazed out of the window, pretending not to have heard the affectedly pathetic sound.

"You must help me, Dot," she said, finally.

"In what?" coldly.

"You know very well."

I sat silent and unresponsive.

"You simply must get me out of it. I told her she'd surely get the money to-day. She threatens to go to Jack if I don't keep my word, and I'm deathly afraid of Jack when it comes to poker." Belle sat nervously squeezing her left hand with her right.

"I don't wonder in the least. And I should think if not afraid, you would be ashamed, to go to Jack's wife."

Belle began to cry, raising both hands childishly to her eyes.

"Listen to me, Dot," she whimpered. "I'll surely pay you before long. One is bound to

win again some day. I felt confident of luck being with me yesterday, and you know I'd been under the weather in the morning, so late in the afternoon I went over to Addie Layton's for a change, and stopped informally to dinner."

Here Belle fairly sobbed.

"Did the dinner poison you?" I asked, sarcastically.

"You can be a fiend at times, Dot," Belle commented, suddenly drying her eyes and gulping. "I proposed a game as we left the dining-room—only Addie, her husband, Percy Earle and I. Well, I lost another fifty, although we kept at it till two this morning. That fifty Lou may manage to give me. But the two hundred for Mrs. Robertson—Oh, Dot, for Heaven's sake don't be so mean! I must pay her, or she will disgrace me. She's wild for the money, and although she says it's for the dressmaker, I don't believe it. She must be in some kind of a scrape herself. Don't you see you've got to help me? And if you persist in being so stingy with your money—"

I was horribly excited. Belle's accusation of stinginess maddened me. Pressing the electric button, I had the carriage stopped and the footman at the door in a couple of seconds. We were at a Sixth Avenue crossing where a man with both legs off was playing a blood-curdling accor-

deon in front of a saloon. Why, by-the-way, does afflicted humanity so frequently haunt saloons? Are half-intoxicated people more charitable than respectable mortals in full posession of their senses? A small boy holding a tin cup stood at the cripple's side. The noise, the people, the sight of the man's mutilated body, carried me beyond myself. I beckoned energetically to the thin little cup-bearer. The boy sprang nimbly towards me, no doubt expecting a nickel. Trembling, I emptied my purse into the cup. There were five ten dollar bills and some change. The child stood as if petrified, and the footman's jaw dropped. From Belle there came a stifled scream and a grab at my arm.

"Drive on," I said, in a shrill voice.

"Are you crazy?" gasped Belle, as the door slammed.

"No; I only wanted to show you how much I care about money. I'd rather give that cripple all I have than pay a copper of your gambling debts. And this is my last word upon the subject, Belle St. John."

The woman did not resent my words as I expected. She sank back in her seat and closed her eyes. She turned so pale that for an instant I thought she had fainted.

"Belle," I cried, conscience-stricken, "Belle! Are you ill?"

I shook her in my anxiety.

"No," she said, wearily. "We must be nearly at Madame's. I'll be all right there."

At that moment the carriage stopped. I hastily got out and told the footman to assist Mrs. St. John. She spoke to a servant in the hall, and we went into the reception-room together. We were barely seated when the servant reappeared with a decanter and two glasses. I remembered the scene at Belle's breakfast in bed, and was hardly surprised when, feeling faint as she did, she took a generous drink of whiskey. Her order to the maid, however, as she set down the glass, completely shocked me.

"Have a couple of cocktails sent to us in the fitting-room," she said, "and don't have them weak."

"Are you better?" I asked, in a perfunctory manner.

"Yes, lots! No thanks to you. I wonder if Madame will keep you waiting long?"

She did not. I was presently in the fitting-room, with Belle, no longer pale, at my elbow. Madame was most respectful to Belle, ever so much more than she was to me, and this although Belle found fault with everything, even the temperature of the room. I began to feel very tired and utterly devoid of any interest in the gowns being fitted to me. The excitement to which

I had yielded on the way down, had been followed by extreme exhaustion. I was dismally wishing I had let the dressmaker go for that day, when the servant who had brought the whiskey to the reception-room, came in with two cocktails in exquisite glasses upon a silver tray. Belle took one nonchalantly, and the tray was brought to me.

"No," I said, drawing back indignantly and thereby suffering a nasty dig of a pin in my arm. "I don't take cocktails."

Madame raised her eyebrows.

"Oh, madame," said she, "all ze ladies drink ze cocktails at ze fitting. It is so fatiguing, ze standing for long time."

"I do not do so," I said, emphatically.

"Bring it to me," murmured Belle. "It won't be wasted."

Mme. Blanchesi made a remark in French to the assistant, who was pinning flounces on my skirt, to the effect that I was a stupid little thing, and as for my figure, it was not laced enough.

My face blazed. Madame was not looking at me and I held my peace till we were leaving. Then I paused at the door and addressed the bowing French woman in her own tongue.

"Send the bill with the gowns, if you please. I shall be through with you at once."

All Madame's suavity did not prevent her from

starting violently. She managed to bow low and muttered something unintelligible.

"Do you mind driving me somewhere and waiting a few minutes?" asked Belle, disspiritedly.

She looked ill and queer, and although I suspected the cocktails, I could not well refuse her request.

"Not at all, I am only going home."

Belle herself gave the address to the man. We had proceeded a few squares further downtown when the horses were pulled up.

"You're sure you won't lend me the two hundred?" Belle asked, turning after leaving the carriage.

Silently I shook my head, again deprecating the cocktails which I believed responsible for the irrelevant question.

Belle continued upon her way. We were in front of an ordinary four-story brownstone house, and I dimly wondered who lived there. The address was certainly not upon my visiting-list.

Fifteen or twenty minutes elapsed before Belle reappeared. She came down the steps rapidly and had rather a frightened expression. The "Home!" she said to the footman was meek compared with her habitual manner of giving an order.

"It's the first time," she said, in a low voice, "and I know it will not be the last."

"The last what?" I asked, impatiently. I hate riddles and conundrums, and Belle had me guessing.

Belle laid her ungloved left hand upon my knee. I gazed blankly at the trim fingers. They told me nothing.

"Don't you see? I generally wore an engagement-ring, didn't I?" She spoke slowly, softly, as though imparting a secret.

There was a long pause.

Belle drew a deep breath.

"It was a glorious stone," she said, slowly; "they gave me three hundred after a very brief haggle. I should have demanded more. They showed me a lot of jewels which they tried to make me believe were more valuable than mine, and for which they had given much less money. Oh, I recognized a few, Dot! Addie Layton's ruby stick-pin beyond a doubt. And there were half a dozen others about which I am more than half sure."

Involuntarily I moved away from Belle.

"Well, Pharisee," she said, tantalizingly, "have you learned something new again—something which, 'I thank Thee, Lord,' you have never done? Don't forget you made it necessary, Dot."

"I don't know what I shall learn next," I said, desperately. "But I know I still possess my reason, and am in no way answerable for your acts. If you didn't gamble, you would not be in such a disgraceful position, nor have to sell your jewelry."

"I merely pawned it," she said, tranquilly, "at a delightful place frequented by the best society; however, unless I have appallingly good luck, it will never be redeemed."

"Your engagement-ring!" I exclaimed.

"Yes: and a fitting disposal of so outraged a symbol. You never knew St. John, my dear, and Jack is not a brute; therefore you don't know to what cruel misery a wedding is often the introduction. If it were not for public opinion I'd throw my wedding-ring into the river."

She was talking loudly now, and I had a sudden dread that through the open window her voice would reach the coachman. It was with enormous relief that I left her at her own door.

I sat and thought a long time alone in my room. Father had brought me up to regard the sanctity and obligations of marriage as stupendous things. I could hear him saying to me shortly after my engagement to Jack: "Little one, the right kind of marriage means sacrifice. unselfishness, patient devotion upon both sides, yet more upon the wife's. Not infrequently, for the wife

it is extreme suffering and death." Father had paused here and his eyes had grown dim. I knew he was thinking of mother, who died the day I was born. "Love makes all this not only possible, but easy—love and God's blessing. Are you sure your love for Jack is strong enough to bear the test which marriage imposes?" I had been sure, and I am still sure, and we are very happy. Are Jack and I the only ones who are not wretched? I reviewed the women I know best in this strange, unrestful, feverish New York. Belle, virtually divorced; Lou, on the verge of public scandal; Mrs. Layton, moaning and complaining over the burden of her increasing family, leaving her children to whatever care they can get from middle-aged women up to all kinds of tricks to spare themselves, who come recommended for taking "full charge!" hating domesticity, abominating exertion in any practical line, and exacting the most humiliating attention from a husband whom she barely tolerates; Mrs. Robertson, openly quarreling with and ridiculing, the rather strait-laced man whom she married for his money, and whom she leads through a maze of dinners, balls, card-parties, theatricals, and yachting and coaching trips.

I paused in despair. These are the women I know best. And the four are enough var-

iegated, so to speak, by different ages and circumstances, to be four pretty fair specimens of New York society-women. Suddenly a light broke over my gloom—I had forgotten Marion LaGrange's mother. Married at eighteen and left a widow at twenty-one, with Marion just a year old, rich and exceptionally beautiful and winning, she had, out of love for her husband, persistently refused to marry again, keeping the memory of those four happy years as the fund of her cheerfulness through life. Both Jack and Marion had told me the story, and its corroboration shines in her face.

"One out of five," I told myself, sighing. Once upon a time two cities would have been spared, could only ten just men have been found. Is the world as bad now as it was then?

Just men!—Jack is one. I think Allison is another, although I admit that I cannot make him out. Quiet, almost wooden indeed, sometimes a trivial action of peculiar tenderness breaks through his self-contained manner. Last Sunday coming from church, I saw him—and no one else did—silently stroke a forlorn, scalded cat. Lame Ann, who was ever ready with proverbial criticisms of her associates and acquaintances, had oracularly declared to me, more than once, "'Tis a good man who likes cats!" I found her words mentally repeating them-

selves as I regarded Mr. Allison in his furtive petting of the outcast feline. Yes, I am not afraid to state, unqualifiedly, that he is a just man—although a difficult riddle, too. Mrs. Robertson's husband would have been admirable in his own country, say three hundred years ago. Mr. Layton is certainly in love with his wife and children, in spite of his wife's caustic tongue and discontented disposition, which all things considered, must make life a burden to him. The other married men I do not know so well. As for the unmarried!

Percy Earle! Unmitigated wretch! Breaking Marion's heart, and for what?

Crosson is coming in with a card. My thought has become incarnate. I go down to receive Percy Earle.

* * * * * * *

I think I was red in the face when I silently extended my hand to Mr. Percy Earle. He was looking very handsome and smart in every particular.

"My third call, Mrs. Woodward," he said, easily, "and the first time I find you at home."

"And the inference you draw?" I asked, rather haughtily, as we both sat down.

"Oh, there can be only two possibilities; you were really out or you were resting to preserve your charming complexion."

I did not like that remark at all, and I retorted impulsively:

"You forget the third possibility; that I might not want to see you."

Mr. Earle looked at a loss. There was a slight pause, during which I felt uncomfortable, and studied the floor. This time it was the man who spoke first, which I think is not the rule, after an embarrassing moment. I was completely taken aback by the dignity in his voice as Mr. Earle said;

"Mrs. Woodward, only give me the slightest hint that you were displeased at seeing my card, and I shall respectfully withdraw."

I glanced up quickly. Often as I had met him, I had found his eyes uniformly expressionless, except while he was talking to Lou. They now flashed at me alarmingly, in spite of the calmness of his tone. Here was temper!

"I beg your pardon," I said, hastily; "I was very rude indeed. And I am not sorry you came."

"Not sorry," he echoed, "and certainly not glad. Well, you are at least frank, Mrs. Woodward. I suppose I am to understand that you don't approve of me?"

This man was ten years younger than Jack, but I felt very young and stupid as he sat opposite me, with angry eyes and quiet words.

I wondered what had caused me to make that unfortunate remark. I wished I had not come down at all. As I sat in silent confusion, Mr. Earle rose.

"You will allow me to bid you good evening, Mrs. Woodward?"

Impetuously I stepped toward him.

"Oh, Mr. Earle, you must forgive me. Really, I am very tired and upset, and I am so sorry I said that. Only, you know, your words about my charming complexion were simply horrid, and I got very angry because I am nervous and irritable to-day. Oh, dear me, how awfully personal this conversation is!"

Horrified, I felt that tears were not far off.

"Would it not be better to end it? I regret extremely that I have annoyed you when you were already tired."

"No, sit down; somehow you are different from what I had thought." I must convince Mr. Earle that I was not rattled.

I dropped into a chair, and reaching forward, pushed one toward my visitor. He took it with a grave, "Thank you."

"Are you going to the Opera to-night?" I asked, in a desperate attempt to say something upon safe ground.

"No, I think not. I'm going to a dinner at

Van Voorts', and that means cards afterwards, you know."

I leaned forward, eagerly, conventionality once more forgotten.

"There, Mr. Earle! That is one of the things you do which I don't like." The words were barely out when I regretted them.

"I am flattered at your interest, really. Oh, no, don't think I am speaking sarcastically. I am not, I assure you. Mrs. Woodward, if I may be as frank as yourself, may I ask if you actually never play?"

"Cards for money? Never. I am sure no nice woman ever does." There was antagonism in my voice.

"Take care! We both know many." Mr. Earle was frowning.

"They are not nice when they play, and ask young men like you to play. So there! Fancy accepting money from a boy like you!"

I was dreadfully in earnest. Mr. Earle laughed.

"If I am a boy, you are hardly a grown girl. Well, Mrs. Woodward, some women do not accept the money. I know one who requested a couple of diamonds instead." He looked at me quizzically.

"You don't!—I mean, how could anyone be so awful? And did you get them for her?"

"I wasn't the man. But the man did."

"I should think her husband might have protested."

Mr. Earle shrugged his shoulders. He, and a few other men, do it gracefully.

"Husbands don't seem to trouble themselves much now-a-days about the little peculiarities of their wives."

"Mr. Earle!" I spoke very severely. He certainly knew better of Jack. Not that I have ever put Jack to the test, but still—

"There are a few shining exceptions, as there are a few exceptional wives." This with his conventional manner and bow to me.

"Oh," I exclaimed, impatiently, "I don't like you a bit when you descend to miserable, threadbare compliments. Why don't you stay angry and on your dignity?"

"You think anger becoming?" very gravely.

"I consider it at least manly, provided it be exhibited in the right place, and under perfect control."

"Thank you for the implied compliment. I admit that you are more subtle and graceful in flattery than any man could hope to be. Let me tell you one thing—although I play poker or bridge, often most of the night, I'm not passionately fond of cards. To be candid, I generally lose, and my income is not so enormous that

I can remain unmoved by a loss. At the present time, an invitation to dinner, particularly where a man is well-acquainted, almost invariably means the obligation of playing cards afterwards; so," smiling, "I fill my pockets with small bills, and invoke the imps that the ante may be low."

"Why aren't you man enough to refuse?"

"When a woman puts the invitation? Do you understand men so slightly as that, Mrs. Woodward?" Mr. Earle was leaning forward, all attention, and even my sensitiveness could no longer detect any banter in his voice or manner.

"And you'd let your wife give such invitations?" I asked, earnestly.

Mr. Earle shifted upon his chair.

"I am not married," he said, stiffly.

"You will be some day," I urged. How would Marion get along with his temper!

"No," he said, shortly. "Never. You may take my word for that. Anyway," frivolously, "if your judgment is right, I'm not fit to marry. You know you hardly wished to receive me today."

"I think I have already sufficiently apologized, Mr. Earle," I said, feeling that this handsome boy was rather getting the better of me. It did not seem as if Marion would be invited to experiment with the temper.

"Why should you apologize, come to think of it? No one can like everybody. I hate a few people most cordially—Worst of all an aged dowager who glares at me regularly whenever I meet her, from the aggressive fortress of a dizzy pink gown."

"Dizzy pink," I repeated, laughing; "what may that mean, Mr. Earle?"

Percy Earle laughed heartily.

"Well, you might not find the color mentioned by that name in the shops, Mrs. Woodward. But don't you know the shade I mean? That offensive, blazing pink which somehow makes one's head swim to look at? It gives me the nearest sensation to being dizzy, of anything I know; particularly when a withered old creature audaciously dons it."

"Yes, I do know the shade you mean. I never wear it."

"No, I should fancy not. You hardly fit into the description of a withered old woman."

"Mr. Earle," I exclaimed, "you seem to be perpetually laughing at me."

Mr. Earle bit his lip, but not before I caught his smile.

"I should never dare make fun of you, Mrs. Woodward; you command too much respect."

"As though I could accept that in earnest while your eyes are wriggling with amusement!

Tell me," suddenly, "have you seen Marion LaGrange recently?" I was still considering the temper.

"Let me think. No, not since the cotillion at Robertsons'. Actually four days ago."

"She's beautiful, don't you think so?"

"Yes," dispassionately. No temper of any sort visible now.

"If I were a man I'd fall in love with her," I persisted.

Percy raised his eyebrows.

"I believe several men have felt that way," said he.

I sighed in despair; it was only too plainly evident that Marion was of no interest whatever to Percy Earle.

"What made you sigh, Mrs. Woodward?"

"Oh, men are such fools," I said, recklessly.

"For loving Marion LaGrange? Isn't that rather inconsistent after declaring if you were a man you would fall in love with her yourself?"

My lips parted to say most injudicious words. There was some fever in the atmosphere which was precipitating me into unreckoning candor. I wonder what would have been the result had I said to Mr. Earle, "You are the particular fool I have in mind, because you *don't* love her?" What would society be like if every one upon all occasions told "the truth, the whole truth, and

nothing but the truth!" I quail before the picture.

Conventionality interposed in the form of Crosson with the tea-tray. Did the wretch have a surmising expression upon his face because I sat leaning forward upon my chair in the excitement of the remark I had nearly made? I straightened up and leaned back hastily. It was a sign of Percy Earle's self-possession and *savoir faire* that he remained in his quizzing, nonchalant position, his elbow upon his knee, and his chin resting upon his hand. I felt myself flushing at the silly start I had given.

"You will have tea with me?" I managed to say, sincerely hoping he would. And to think that I was beginning to like him!

"Thank you," springing up. "I can't. I had no idea it was so late. I promised to drop in at Mrs. Allison's."

Very disconsolately, had he only known it, I accepted his adieu. I wished devoutly that he had been going anywhere else rather than to Lou's.

"May I come again?" he asked, gaily.

"Yes," I answered, seriously; "whenever you like."

Jack found me with the untouched tea before me.

"Well! Had visitors? And weren't they nice?"

I kissed him rather absently.

"Only one—Percy Earle. He's different from what I thought."

I am sure it is all Lou's fault: which may be the severity of one woman upon another, to be sure, and yet I do not know.

There were two reasons why I did not tell Jack about Belle's visit to a pawn-broker. First, it would not be honorable to betray what she certainly considered a confidence; second, it would have humiliated me too painfully to admit that one of my sex was so lacking in womanly respect and reserve. Had anyone related the story to me, I should have said my credulity was not equal to the strain of believing it. As it is, I cannot deny what I have seen and heard. I am wofully disappointed all around: I expected New York society to be something extraordinarily fine and elevated. The facts force me to confess that Belle St. John would be a pitiable *mésalliance* for, well, Rube Stevens; while most of the others I know, would be compelled to move out of Graytown if ever they attempted to domicile themselves there, because morals at home are still in the old-fashioned, intact state produced by the preaching of the Ten Commandments to people who believe they

have souls. And the scintillations produced here by the clashing of old ideas with new defiance of them, would in such communities, be considered as nothing less than prophetic gleams from the awful fire which burns in Hell.

* * * * * * *

In the soul of Mrs. Alexander Robertson there can be but two highly-developed attributes: the first, self-indulgence; the second,—co-equal in all things, although of necessity separately named—the faculty of hoodwinking her husband. Mr. Robertson is piously inclined, conscientious if not intellectual, and while not always openly opposed to his wife's proceedings and mode of life, at least dazedly miserable and uneasy under many of her doings. Mr. Robertson possesses, for instance, a deeply grounded prejudice against what he designates the "profanation of the Sabbath." Well and good, says Mrs. Robertson. The Sabbath shall not be profaned. Alexander stolidly but persistently protesting against dinner-giving upon Sunday, as contrary to the spirit of a holy and recollected Lord's Day, Mrs. Robertson calmly assents to the taboo, in letter if not in spirit, and issues written invitations for a supper at ten o'clock, on Sunday evening next. Surely a supper is not a dinner, particularly when partaken of at the chastened hour of ten at night!

"Shall we eat anything between luncheon at half-past one and that supper at ten, Jack?"

"You'd better, Dot. Make your five o'clock tea rather substantial, and I'll join you at it."

Probably it is odd that no scruple prevented my accepting what was for me such a novel invitation. The explanation lies in the fact that I ignorantly pictured a nice innocent little meal with hot biscuits, or waffles maybe, such as Lame Ann triumphantly set before us when Uncle Dalton or a couple of College Professors called Sunday afternoon—and remained so late that Ann, provided she was in good humor, would not have them depart fasting. The good humor lacking, it was Ann's scheme to light no lamps, and by this means have darkness remind the visitors that it was time to go home. No one questioned Anna's decision, neither father, visitors, nor I.

At half-after-nine, decorously gowned in blue broadcloth of tailor-make, I appeared before Jack in his den. He glanced up from a book and stared in an uncomplimentary fashion at my faultless costume.

"Hello! You'd better dress."

"Why, isn't this good enough?"

"Good enough! Don't you know we're going to Robertsons' supper? Mrs. Robertson would fancy you had dressed for a funeral."

"Certainly I know we are going. Do you

mean," incredulously, "I ought to wear an evening-gown? It's Sunday, Jack."

"If you're going, dear, you must dress as for any dinner."

I stood still, shocked, although for the life of me, I could not have told exactly why. Father positively had not brought me up a Puritan.

"What's the trouble, little one?" Jack tossed away his cigar and stood up. "You know you needn't go if you don't want to. For my part I can't see where the harm comes in."

"No," I said, rather softly and meekly. "I'll be ready in ten minutes. If—if I don't like it, I needn't go again."

Jack made some remark which I did not hear, because, nervous at the idea that we should in all probability be late, I was flying up the stairs. I am possessed of a blind terror of Mrs. Robertson's well-known temper; and we should be tardy at a time when it was a question of things to eat, I gravely reflected.

Perkins did not stare very much when I peremptorily ordered my white crêpe de Chine. Of all my evening gowns it is the least gorgeous; and still under the influence of some inborn disapproval of giddy clothes upon Sunday, I compromised with my murmuring conscience by unhesitatingly choosing the simplest thing I have, that would be considered correct at dinner. For

I sternly told myself that Mrs. Robertson's invitations had been written lies.

While being hooked and pinned and buttoned into evening clothes, I fumed within at the delay my toilet was causing. Woman's obligations to costume are a warning to man not to riot to any great extent in recent additions to the form, color or texture of his practical-for-all-purposes attire, which has served so well and so satisfactorily several generations of his kind. Jack has taken up with many innovations since the first day I knew him in Graytown, little dreaming what trouble he is laying up for himself. How much handsomer he is in strictly black, white or gray things! Perhaps Rube Stevens spoiled me for admiration of colored waistcoats and other togs. I never see gay clothes upon a man without fancying I hear the jingle of Rube's jewelry. He was exactly like a poor, ignorant, brainless girl prancing to the accompaniment of her tinkling tin bangles and chains.

Quite flustered, I reached Jack's den as the clock struck ten.

"I couldn't be any quicker, somehow."

"That's all right. We'll be there in ten minutes."

But one horse lost a shoe, and the streets were icy. Fifth Avenue was so crowded with vehicles that we got into almost a hopeless block, and it

was a good half-hour before we stepped inside Mrs. Robertson's door.

There is a delicate consolation, a subtle encouragement, in finding other guests in the room where one removes her wraps. This time two disengaged maids stepped forward as I entered. My heart sank. I was surely the last one, and all the rest had gone downstairs. Twice between the mirror and the door I dropped my fan. The second time, the maid bestowed upon me a humiliating glance of pity.

Silently I took Jack's arm. Laughter and many voices were floating gayly through the house. As we descended, the notes of a Neapolitan orchestra of violins and mandolins trembled and kling-klanged in the familiar contradictory and inconsistent fashion, from behind some theatrical palms—I mean they were the so-called preserved ones, not genuinely sprouting things, —at the back of the great hall. Involuntarily I paused. It was Sunday, and the mandolins sounded so very frivolous and irreverent. Ah! A boy's voice began the "Holy City."

"How beautiful," I whispered, my emotions instantly changing, and my conscience oddly soothed.

A loud peal of merriment jarred into the sweet soprano voice. Lou Allison's laugh was recognizable before we entered the drawing-room and

Mrs. Robertson greeted us. The latter was a spectacle to jar the brain of anybody seriously inclined to the artistic. Her garments were a medley of purple and poppy red, and immense lumps of jet apparently thrown at the gown from a distance and then made fast wherever they struck. A great bunch of artificial flowers was attached to her coiffure above the left ear. Evidently she had essayed a fuchsia color scheme—with her flaming fuchsia complexion! Then her hair was low on her neck, and her head is quite too thick through, without that.

The whole scene, as it burst upon us, was a glaring travesty upon the hymn being sung outside. About twenty people were waiting the announcement for supper, all in evening-dress, all talking and flirting and jesting, paying no attention whatever to the music, speaking rather more loudly and boisterously in order to be heard above the singing and accompaniment. Our hostess was plainly provoked because we were late.

"I am glad you have got here at last," she shouted, completely drowning the singers' crescendo.

I bowed silently and with becoming humility, glad that I need not undertake an apology while the singing continued.

"Mr. Van Voort will take you in," said Mrs. Robertson in the same tone. Here the music

sank to an unexpected diminuendo and the last three words burst upon the company like three shrill Indian yells. A young girl laughed, and Mrs. Robertson flushed angrily.

Was it spite which impelled her to assign to me Mr. Van Voort? We harmonize like oil and water. I relinquished Jack and saw him allotted the doubtful pleasure of Addie Layton's society. Mr. Van Voort, bowing from the waist so that his body was fairly kinked, presented his arm to me, and I was resignedly moving down the drawing-room with him, when an elderly dowager stood suddenly in front of us. She was a hideous old creature in low-necked white satin of cheap texture and rather soiled. She wore a brown wig too far back upon her head, and a little dot of rouge upon each cheek-bone.

"So you're the young person that has kept us all waiting!" said she, severely. "What made you so late?"

"Mamma!" exclaimed Mrs. Robertson, dashing at the old woman and looking embarrassed for the first and only time in my acquaintance with her. Her own displeasure had at least not reached quite such freedom as this.

I gasped and stammered, while Mr. Van Voort undisguisedly giggled. Never before had I heard of Mrs. Robertson's mother.

"Mrs. Woodward is an important personage,

you know," said Van Voort, in his thin, silly voice, "and for such, one is always delighted to wait."

He dragged me on, giggling continuously.

"Beastly old creature," he confided. "Won't give any one a cent, and is as rich as the devil. Oh, I beg your pardon, you know. Hear you're awfully proper and easily shocked. Must get over it, Mrs. Woodward. Watch my wife and Belle St. John. There's no shocking those two girls, you know. I tell Alice I don't know who is the greater case—she or her chum Belle."

Though only momentary, it was an appreciable relief to be looking for my place and able to drop Mr. Van Voort's arm. There were two round tables in the dining-room, each a perfect fantasy of roses, pink-shaded lights, silver and gold. Four men in Mrs. Robertson's fantastic livery, stood waiting to serve this Sunday-night supper. I forgot Mr. Van Voort's maddening grin and his ugly little moustache, while I discovered that Mr. Allison would sit at my left, and Percy Earle directly opposite me. Jack was at the other table, a disappointment that was materially ameliorated by the fact that the awful dowager in white satin was also assigned to the table at which I was not. This arrangement was undoubtedly not without purpose. Mrs. Robertson had found it desirable to main-

tain a grip, as it were, upon her uncertain and erratic maternal ancestor. Mr. Robertson, a very silent and abstracted host, was at our table. Apparently there was nothing to his taste; for every line in his severe face portrayed acute disapproval from the moment the first course was served, and his expression of condemnation steadily intensified as the dinner wore on.

"Robertson's enough to give one indigestion, isn't he, Mrs. Woodward?" Van Voort whispered, holding a stalk of celery before his mouth —and if it did not exactly match his moustache!

"I prefer him to—" I almost said "you," and barely tripped myself up in time to substitute, "some others."

"To the mother-in-law for instance? He-he-he! She's a fierce old screw, and cares for nothing but saving money. Lives in a hole of a place in Maine, and when she swoops upon her daughter in New York, she appears in evening togs bought second-hand. Why, it was her cruelty and miserliness that made her daughter take old Robertson. She made the girl do housework, as though she needed to save, you know." Mr. Van Voort wrinkled his face up until he was a perfect counterpart of the biggest monkey in Central Park. "What a beastly bore it must

be to bother about money! Fancy having to scrimp!"

"I needn't fancy having to save. I'm sure," sweetly, "that Mrs. Van Voort has told you we were obliged to live very economically at home. The necessity has been stern reality in my case." Then with a gold fork and spoon, I helped myself mechanically to sweet breads *aux truffes.*

Mr. Van Voort stared blankly. If, in his ethics, it is idiocy to be poor, it is greater idiocy to acknowledge the shameful fact. Mr. Allison, was laughing heartily, but quietly, at my left. The two men can not love each other to any great extent: when they met, they merely bowed distantly instead of shaking hands as I saw all the other men do.

"Isn't it strange," I asked, thinking aloud, "that the LaGranges aren't here?"

"Not at all, you know. Marion won't go anywhere but to church on Sunday. Dead slow, anyway, isn't she?"

"Not in the least," I returned, showing my vexation. "She is simply above your power of comprehension."

"Oh—ah—Come now!—It must be below, don't you think?"

"That would be impossible, Mr. Van Voort."

"Oh, my, but you're a termagant! I pity Woodward! Upon my soul I do!"

It was no use to flare up. I had been rude and quick-tempered and the first fault lay with me. Not in the least offended, Mr. Van Voort devoted himself tenderly and lingeringly to a pâté, and I lost my anger in speculating as to whether Marion would cease to respect me because I had gone to Mrs. Robertson's supper. I am acquiring the tendency of regarding myself in the light of Marion's conscience, instead of my own. It is not so comfortable as the old way. The changing of plates brought me out of an untimely revery. Van Voort, beaming under the spell of another rich and delectable dish, was once more a picture of grinning amiability.

Two hours we sat at table, and as champagne again and again ceased to sparkle in the glasses, it appeared to dance bewilderingly in the guests' heads. Higher and more hilarious waxed the spirits of the company. The Neapolitan musicians played at intervals—only to fulfill their contract, I am sure, for no one listened; two or three times the boy-soprano sang. Suddenly, as he began the first verse of Neidlinger's Serenade, Mrs. Robertson's mother rose threateningly. In leaving her seat she overturned a couple of glasses, an accident which did not in the least disconcert her. Possibly because they were empty.

"Have that music stopped," she cried: "it's Sunday."

"Pardon me, mamma, it's a quarter past twelve, and therefore Monday morning." Mrs. Robertson, with all her coarse braggadocio manner was afraid of her rattle-brained mother. What a very palpable sort of a family-skeleton to be afflicted with!

"Oh, how scandalous! At dinner half the night!"

But the old lady was befuddled even a trifle more than nature had intended, and dropped back harmlessly in her seat to drink one more glass of champagne.

The heat in the dining-room was stifling. All the women whose hair did not curl naturally began to look stringy about the forehead. This over-heating is a frequent cause of misery at New York functions. Upon each occasion it calls forth, as though it were something quite new, complaints and growls innumerable; but it never fails to be an adjunct of the very next entertainment one attends—which recalls a remark I heard Percy Earle make to Jack:

"Did you assist at the Bayley-Taylor wedding?" asked Jack.

"No, old man," was Percy's reply, "I perspired at it."

Besides the heat, the heavy perfume of several

hundreds of roses had made the atmosphere so intensely oppressive that I found myself growing sleepy, and was seeking comfort in the thought that I could not possibly be affected by the wine for the best of reasons—I had not taken any—when suddenly I became interested and wide-awake.

"Go on, Percy. Tell it."

"No, Addie; I don't enjoy discussing my relatives." This, turning slightly in his chair: for Mrs. Layton was next to Jack at the other table.

"If you don't, I will."

"That I can't help." Percy scowled ominously. Mrs. Layton gave an excited laugh.

"You all know Lil, my sister who married the Philadelphian?" Several chuckled an affirmative; probably Lil was a good sort.

"Well, perhaps you haven't forgotten her prize St. Bernard?"

"Of course not," piped Mr. Van Voort, eagerly. "I wish she'd sell it to me."

"She might be willing just now. Lil's very fond of going about, you know, and staying at home with her young infant hasn't pleased her particularly. Well, that St. Bernard dog was madly devoted to the baby from the first day, and remained day and night beside the crib until, when Lil's child was three weeks old, some puppies arrived. Then the trouble began. The dog

seemed half-frantic between devotion to Lil's baby and to its own puppies, and would trot up and down the stairs dozens of times every day to look first at the doggies and then at the child."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Van Voort, who had apparently been begrudging Lil this dog for some time. "What an extraordinary beast!"

Mrs. Layton was warming up to her subject. This was the first occasion upon which I had ever seen her show any animation except along the line of petulancy. Query: Is champagne really good for such characters? Perhaps, only the reaction next day is liable to be extreme. Fancy Addie Layton crosser and more discontented than she is normally!

"Extraordinary, and very exciting it proved. When the baby was six weeks old, and the puppies three, Lil wanted to go to a ball." Mrs. Layton paused; after a second she resumed in a tone calculated to dig into the conscience of every married man present. "She has a most exacting husband, and is terribly afraid of him, poor child!" The sigh was deep, and a scathing glance flashed across to Mr. Layton, who wilted most gratifyingly. "Now the infant's nurse, like all servants, managed to have a relative die on the day of the ball, and Lil was in a quandary. Her husband had laid down an iron rule that either she or the nurse must be with

the baby day and night. Easily understood with the first!" Another sigh, and I immediately expected to hear something about the "five helpless children;" however, Mrs. Layton must have alluded to them inaudibly, for she went on with the story.

"Lil decided to say nothing about the nurse's absence, as her husband in his unreasonable way would have insisted upon her staying at home, and told her maid that she must remain in the nursery all night. She was under no circumstances to leave the baby alone."

I began to wonder whether Mrs. Layton had forgotten the St. Bernard doggie of which I was longing to hear more.

"Everything nicely arranged, Lil departed for the ball, leaving the French maid stationed at the crib. Lil says she had a perfectly glorious time, and forgot all about the youngster. But when she and Arthur came home at three o'clock in the morning, they found their baby gone."

"Mercy!" cried one of the young girls, and indeed everybody started, even the men, except Percy Earle, who did not seem to relish the recital at all. Mrs. Layton was enjoying her own story immensely. She sat abstractedly, creasing her napkin into little pleats, her eyes brilliant, her small face animated and flushed.

"Picture the household! The maid had been

entertaining her sweetheart in the lower hall till twelve o'clock, when he went on duty as somebody's night-watchman. She went up to the nursery then, to find the coverings of the crib all in disorder, and the baby gone. Of course she waked the household, and when Lil and Arthur returned, the place was illuminated, and a set of crazy servants awaited them. The French maid had been struck by the cook for her carelessness, and was on her knees vowing all kinds of penance if the baby were found, while she held cracked ice against the eye the cook had almost put out!"

"Did they find the child?" Mrs. Robertson asked, in a bored voice.

"Arthur tore around like a maniac, telegraphed the police station, and then began to run through the house. It's a huge place, with backstairs about a mile from the front ones, but as he opened the door to the lowest flight, Lil stopped her hysterics, and the servants their praying and wailing, for all very distinctly heard the crying of a baby."

"Where was it?" asked half-a-dozen.

"In the basket with Donna and her puppies, while Donna was crying to it in great distress."

Various exclamations greeted this climax of Mrs. Layton's dog-story, which certainly was a

compliment to Donna's intelligence and maternal affection.

"Do you mean to say," said Mr. Allison, in his deliberate way, "that the dog heard the baby fretting upstairs, and went and fetched it?"

Mrs. Layton smiled in her superior manner. She never relaxes her lips entirely, and the result is a small, sarcastic smirk. Belle St. John says Addie has lost the first bicuspid tooth on the left, and that the restricted play of her lips is due to her desire to hide the resulting vacuum. Whatever the reason, Addie's abbreviated smiles appear perfectly consistent with her manner and character.

"More than that, Lil says that whenever Donna heard the infant cry, she would run upstairs to inquire, as it were, what was wrong, and invariably stayed away from the puppies till the baby was quiet. Upon this occasion, the puppies must have been awake and crying too, and Donna, torn between two loves, carried the baby down to her own family so that she could manage all of them at once. But wasn't it cute?" She appealed to Allison.

"It was more than cute, it was motherly beyond—"

Mrs. Robertson's mother interrupted Allison.

"That's what I say," cried she, "motherly beyond the inhuman mother you call Lil. Let her

learn from the dog—and be thankful for the opportunity."

This outburst brought a spasm to Mrs. Robertson's face, and a well-meant murmur from two or three of the guests who wished to drown, as it were, the shocking remarks by hastening to speak of something, anything, wide of the unlucky subject which had started the half-crazy old woman's indignant loquacity.

"I was about to say," Allison went on calmly, "that the dog placed herself upon a higher plane than the world generally allots the brute creation."

"The mother was a brute to leave her young baby to the mercy of a giddy girl, besides acting a lie to her husband. You'd better put the mother in the brute creation, and the dog with the human." Mrs. Robertson's mamma was not to be extinguished, and if her thoughts were not lucid, they were at least emphatic.

Rising in clumsy haste, with the capability of strangling her mother in her eyes, Mrs. Robertson spoke in a suffocated voice:

"Shall we not leave the men to themselves?"

Percy Earle, Mr. Van Voort, and a thin young man who had spoken little and seemed but slightly acquainted with the party, left the dining-room with the rather unfortunately amused women. Even Mrs. Robertson's bosom friends

rejoice in her annoyance at times. For an instant I was disappointed, because Jack left Mrs. Layton at the door, and returned to the mystic rite of the men's coffee and cigars. Afterwards I was glad he did, because enough remarks have been made about his being tied to my apron-string.

It was a quarter-to-one. Sunday evening was well gone. The musicians had departed, and a sudden stillness settled upon the house. Cigarettes and liqueurs being passed, nearly every woman began to smoke, and smoking checks conversation. Lou Allison, who had been decidedly chagrined at being separated from Percy Earle all through the supper, claimed him now, and they slipped into one of the far corners of the immense drawing-room, from which now and then Lou's cigarette sent out light wreaths of smoke.

Presently Addie Layton began to fuss. Repose is not in her line. Sundry bitings of the lips, jerks of the head, workings of the fingers, caused me to wonder what was worrying her. I soon knew. Layton appearing from the dining-room, she sprang up in quite a tiger-like fashion.

"I told you to come in five minutes," she complained, "and you've been all of fifteen."

"Sorry, my dear," was the meek and smiling

return. "Are you really in such haste to be off?"

"I'm tired to death," in a very aggrieved tone. "Men never think of anything except their own amusement."

Two other men had wandered in, after Layton, and their wives taking the cue from Addie, Mrs. Robertson's guests were rapidly reduced by six. I fancied the hostess appeared glad of their departure. Mrs. Robertson is a woman who flourishes best when in the society of only the most congenial spirits—few and choice, but of the right vintage.

No one bothered about conversing with me during the general lull which again prevailed in the drawing-room, and glancing idly about I soon found myself watching the thin young man who was a good deal of a stranger to his surroundings. I knew he was a cousin of Marion LaGrange's mother, a boy but a few months from a country-town, and my heart went out to him in sincerest sympathy: we were to a certain extent companions in misery. The self-assured young girl whom he had taken in to dinner had frightened him almost into imbecility by her volubility and impertinence. His natural bashfulness and awkwardness were painfully accentuated by the wine, of which he had taken more than was good for him. The only people he

seemed to know well were the Robertsons and Percy Earle.

"Dear me! What shall we do next?" yawned Belle St. John.

"We might have a game of bridge," suggested Mrs. Robertson.

"Who—The lot of us?" querulously.

"No, hardly."

"I don't like bridge: I never have any luck."

"Well, poker isn't so worse," squealed Mr. Van Voort, from the other side of the room. "How about you and Mrs. Rob, Belle, and Neddie Lawrence and me? Or as many as want to?"

Neddie Lawrence, as he called the slender youth, looked alarmed.

"I don't play extra well," he ventured.

"Nonsense. It's nothing but luck. You may clean us all out," said Mrs. Robertson's heavy voice. With visible eagerness she had already rung for a servant.

"And I should like to know," interposed the terrible mother, "what you expect the rest of your guests to do?"

"Why, play too, or talk, or whatever they like." The servant appeared at Mrs. Robertson's broad red elbow. "Cards, Jones, and a table."

"Well, I prefer to go to bed. And I think it's high time lights were out and you saved

on your gas-bill—or electricity-bill, which is even more expensive." The old woman gathered up her long skirts, a lump in each hand, displaying a coarse black petticoat in a " V " at each side.

" Yes, mamma. Good-night, mamma."

Mrs. Robertson placed her arm about her mother's waist and guided her very forcibly towards the door. " Sleep well, mamma!" said she, suppressed anger giving a cutting irony to her voice. " I don't think New York agrees with you so well as Maine. The hours are too late."

" But I like the champagne, dear," snickering, " and the good dinners Robertson pays for. Ah, good-night, all!"

A courtesy with the skirt drawn higher, till the old creature looked for all the world like the woman whose dog did not know her because her skirts were " cut round about," a foolish chuckle, and Mrs. Robertson's mother retired from view.

" What a humiliation!" whispered Van Voort to me. " And she has millions—dozens of them!"

" And therefore must be tolerated," I retorted, impulsively. He shrugged his shoulders as much as to say that I was not worth an argument. The next instant Mrs. Robertson touched his arm, and he turned to the card-table, leaving me standing alone in the center of the room.

"Mrs. Woodward! Take this chair, won't you?"

It was Percy Earle who had jumped up, and although Lou looked at me in anything but an inviting way, I gratefully dropped into the proffered chair, because I had suffered one of those ridiculous moments of embarrassment which overwhelm a woman if she be unceremoniously abandoned by her erstwhile companion in the shape of a man. Mr. Van Voort has never failed in making me feel that in his opinion I am of absolutely no account in the universe.

"You don't intend to play, Mr. Earle?" I asked, struggling to conceal my annoyance.

Lou answered for him without removing the cigarette from her lips.

"No, we prefer to talk. Oh, don't look fierce, Dot; we don't mind you. Do we, Percy?"

The cigarette gave a thick, unrefined tone to her voice; did she not know it?

"Mrs. Woodward is always a delightful addition; but she won't listen to compliments, you know."

I scarcely heard him, as I was being rapidly fascinated by the group playing poker, and the very unintelligibility of the expressions used riveted my attention. Mrs. Robertson, Belle and Van Voort sat with elbows upon the mahogany table. Neddie Lawrence leaned back in his chair

and held his cards close to him. His teeth were pressed into his lower lip. No one outside of these four seemed inclined to play. Several of the women guests lounged near the players, apparently a good deal interested in the progression of the game while not anxious to take a hand. Now this is, as accurately as I could get it, what I heard and saw:

Van Voort had dealt. Neddie Lawrence asked to discard, did so, drew new cards, and then his teeth had gone into his lips. The countenances of the others were stonily unexpressive, but while Mrs. Robertson kept her face immovable, she could not control a heightened redness in her cheeks, which might mean excitement, pleasurable or otherwise. In the center of the table lay some chips.

"Remember, the ante is one dollar," warned Mrs. Robertson.

"We're not in the habit of forgetting, are we?" returned Van Voort, tartly. I concluded his hand did not please him.

Inadvertently, Mrs. Robertson glared at him and sharply recovered herself.

"The limit," she continued, icily, "is five."

Then began a kind of Babel.

"I go in," said Belle St. John, cautiously. She threw a chip into the center of the table. It struck its relations which already graced the

board, quite musically, and slipped daintily into a convenient little crevice. Neddie Lawrence, saying nothing, deposited two bits of ivory. Somehow his chips were not so graceful and self-possessed as Belle's. They clattered nervously into the pile, and slid off to its outer edge. Mrs. Robertson's bushy eyebrows rose, graphically implying that Neddie was rash.

"I see you, and raise a dollar," she said, her eyes beginning to snap in spite of herself. Money is money every time; it matters little from whom it is won. More chips went into the pile.

"I make good and raise another dollar," cried Van Voort, in royal good humor. Of course, money is no object with him.

Three pairs of eyes were now fixed upon Belle St. John. She did not consider more than an instant, and yet, so eager was the attention that Van Voort bluntly prompted,

"Hurry up, Belle—It's your say."

"I go you one better," she said, distinctly. "But keep your reminder for yourself, Van." Was Belle losing her temper a bit?

"Come on, Lawrence," screamed Van Voort, defiantly. "If Belle needs no prompting, you do."

Neddie Lawrence, his eyes meaninglessly fixed upon Belle, seemed like one waked from sleep.

"See you," said he, shortly.

And the chips continued to multiply.

"Don't try a bluff game, Neddie," Mrs. Robertson exclaimed, half-angrily. "You'll only be wild when you lose."

"Not at all," Lawrence answered, beginning to flush nervously. He sat beneath an unshaded incandescent light, and the glow spreading over his face was a relief: for he had looked like a corpse in his pallor.

"Everyone can't have good hands at once," pursued Mrs. Robertson, her self-control conspicuous by its absence.

Van Voort banged his fist down upon the table. I said, "Oh!" and, mortified at the involuntary exclamation, hastily covered my mouth with my handkerchief, as people so frequently do when the spoken word has done the mischief no number of handkerchiefs can undo.

"That's not fair, Mrs. Rob," said Van Voort, his squeal lost in a queer gruffness; "quit talking across the board, I say!"

"It's your say, Mrs. Rob," hastily interposed Belle St. John. "For pity's sake don't begin to fight." This rather proved that Belle was judging the others by her own irritability.

Mrs. Robertson began running her fingers through her ugly curly hair—hair which cannot fail to impress one as being hopelessly common and unaristocratic and but a poor background

for her gorgeous diamond tiara. She was wild to win, and struggling not to call the game before more betting had been accomplished.

"I see you," she said, excitedly, to Lawrence, "and go you the limit better."

Belle St. John, catching her breath, leaned expectantly toward Van Voort.

"The devil!" said he, shrilly. "I pass out."

Mrs. Robertson openly smiled. Belle glanced down at her own cards and looked anxious. The "say" was hers again; she had lost confidence in her hand, and was in doubt what she should do.

"Well? Lost your spunk?" asked Mrs. Robertson.

"No," drawled Belle, "I—see you."

Mrs. Robertson was astonished and pleased; she pulled Neddie Lawrence's sleeve. He, moving suddenly, drew his chair across a bit of Belle's long train and tore a dreadful rent in the spangled net. Belle glanced at the damage, frowned a trifle, and drew her draperies within more limited space. Neddie Lawrence was unconscious of the accident.

"I," said he, in what must have been a moment of desperate insanity, "see you too—I—I'm not afraid."

"Well," Mrs. Robertson said, rising and tossing a handful of chips into the goodly pile," I

make good and call you, Neddie." She threw down her cards and laughed confidently.

Lawrence turned blue-white; he drew his chair forward and the cards he held dropped listlessly upon the table. Belle and Van Voort stooped eagerly over the two hands of cards, at the same time laying down their own.

"Golly!" ejaculated Belle St. John. "You swipe the pile, Mrs. Rob! See here, Mr. Lawrence, a full house! And the next best is my two pair! What the dickens did you bet on, anyway?" This to the boy who had lost so badly.

Neddie Lawrence made a silly attempt at a laugh. It was only too sadly plain how far the wine had muddled him.

"Come, deal again!" said Mrs. Robertson, abruptly. "Give him a chance to win it back. No—don't pay now; Van Voort keeps the score and we settle when we break up."

"Yes," volunteered Van Voort, "when we break up broke."

"I—think—I'd better go. I must be at the bank early in the morning."

Lawrence was a pitiable object—standing there before his unprincipled hostess. She was old enough to be his mother, and she knew the boy was half-intoxicated; these facts did not prevent her from gloating over all she could win from him. She patted Neddie's arm in a manner at

once impatient and re-assuring, but before she could speak, Belle teasingly interrupted.

"To blow up a vault? No need. Play again, Mr. Lawrence. First losers, last winners, you know."

The sound of the men coming from the dining-room precipitated Neddie Lawrence back into his seat. Mrs. Robertson had begun to deal. This time he did not change any of his cards, while Belle and Van Voort clamored loudly against their luck, insisted upon having the grain of the table, and discarded almost all of their original hands.

Jack's face and Mr. Robertson's were very diverting. Jack looked surprised, then infinitesimally shrugged his shoulders, and came over to sit next me. Mr. Allison, inscrutable before poker as everything else, took a chair near Belle St. John.

"Shan't we go?" Jack asked, considerable meaning in the tone.

Mr. Robertson had whispered something to his wife, eliciting the reply, "It's Monday, Alexander, and people may go to the deuce with their scruples!" Then he came, a distracted look in his eyes, to Jack.

"Could you, Woodward, just for fifteen minutes, discuss Northern Pacific with me? If Mrs. Woodward won't mind?"

An eager interest in the gambling had taken possession of me. I was ready to cry for Neddie Lawrence, and wanted to see what his fate would be. To leave would have been a penitential duty. And it was not mere curiosity, nor gambling-mania either—I was painfully concerned for the country-boy, who from present appearances seemed likely to prove a weakling under temptation.

"I don't mind, Jack. Really, I'm no longer sleepy."

"Very well, Robertson."

Stocks are Mr. Robertson's solace and salvation. For him they are substitutes for a wife's love, children and a happy home. The development of a new syndicate takes the place of the arrival of a new baby; a panic is the representative agony of a child's mortal illness; prophecies verified, given advice successfully followed, are the tender consolations a wife might reasonably be expected to supply; margins and "shorts" are not altogether unpleasant anxieties which might rank with the misgivings of a parent as to his son's vices at college. Wall Street makes up for this man a life which otherwise would be blank and empty.

As Jack consented to linger a while longer, an odd expression of relief suffused Mr. Robertson's

troubled features. He took Jack's elbow, and they went out of sight and hearing.

Except for those at the poker game, Lou, Allison and Percy, the guests were leaving—the women yawningly tired, and the men in a business-like hurry to be off, now that eating and drinking were at an end. How frank men are in their preferences!

Women are the safeguards of social politeness and conventionality. Without much effort and with only decent self-respect, they might be guardians of social honesty and cleanliness.

"How you watch them, Dot. You'll soon be a player yourself."

I started at Lou's voice. Mrs. Robertson had been most brief and pre-occupied as she bade her guests good-night, and was now back at the game, which absorbed her utterly. Over and over cards were dealt, chips fell or were gathered in, the peculiar language was excitedly employed, arguments arose, voices waxed loud and even impolite, and once Van Voort saying, "Damn it!" when Belle St. John showed a "straight flush," made no apology. I closed my eyes curiously. Yes, it was true that conscious only of the speech, no human mind would ever have fitted it into such surroundings and among such people. Belle's frail white arms and hands and baby-face seemed especially out of place.

Her words belonged to the coarse lips and questionable society of a bar-room. Lolling in a palace she talked like a cow-boy!

Neddie Lawrence lost on every deal. He was no longer pale, but the color of his face was worse than pallor. Finally, sobered through fright, his young figure tense with excitement, he determinedly rose.

"I must stop now. Truly I haven't enough money with me to cover my indebtedness."

"You may use my check-book," said Mrs. Robertson, promptly. "I bank at the Falconers', too."

He hesitated, and just then Percy Earle, his lips barely separated, spoke in a low tone to Lou Allison. She immediately and unquestioningly rose. If only Allison were more masterful!

"Come, Belle, I'm going home and there's only one carriage."

"Wait a minute—I raise you. Oh, the deuce! You see me, do you? When this hand is finished, Lou." Belle was hoping to win again, and was quivering with excitement as she scanned her cards.

She lost, and more than canceled her former winnings. With commendable effort to conceal her disappointment, she smilingly left the table. Van Voort was settling up the account.

"If—if Mrs. Robertson will accommodate me with a blank, I shall write a check for the amount," I heard Neddie Lawrence say. He seemed to have grown thinner.

A dreadful pang shot through my heart. Was it imagination or were Neddie's clothes shabby? Brushed and pressed to a nicety, they were wanting in the opulent finish that distinguished the other men's attire. Marion had told me he held an insignificant position in the bank. What had she said?—Assistant to the discount clerk, or something similar. And his people at home were poor! Oh, foolish boy, to attempt to keep pace with these reckless individuals who are going, even for them, at break-neck speed! A strange, weary faintness came over me. Unobserved I slipped out into the wide hall, where cool air, not to say dangerous draughts, made the atmosphere more comfortable. Wishing Jack would come, I walked slowly up and down. The change of atmosphere fairly struck at my bare neck and arms, and I found myself growing uncomfortably chilly. In one corner, near the back of the hall, was a sheltered seat on which I finally settled myself, anxiously eying the stairs for Jack's appearance. I had not been two minutes in the protected corner, before Neddie Lawrence and Percy Earle came out of the drawing-room

and paused within ten feet of me; they could not see me because of the palms.

"Don't be foolish, Lawrence; it's only a hundred, but it will help you out of this, and then take my advice and quit."

Percy's earnest whisper was very distinct. I was too surprised and too tired and sleepy to speak, or to give the warning cough, which custom consecrates to such situations.

"I can't be such a cad, Percy. And honestly I can get the money to-morrow." The voice faltered, in the very assertion.

I could see Percy's face. It set itself very sternly.

"Not without some disagreeable sacrifice, or your face lies. You look ill and used-up, my boy. You're worried. Take it, Lawrence, and return it as soon as you can, for I'm not rich."

The money was thrust into Lawrence's hand, at the instant that a servant appeared with two raglans. I made myself as small as I could upon the seat, and as the footman let the two men out, slipped back to the drawing-room where Mrs. Robertson and Lou Allison and her husband were now alone.

"If you came last, you also stay last," said Mrs. Robertson to me, intending to be agreeable, I believe: for she was openly elated over her winnings. I was conscience-stricken by the

knowledge that I had listened to a conversation not meant for me, and meekly announced that I should go for my wrap, and would she send for Mr. Woodward?

At three o'clock I laid my buzzing head upon the pillow. And I dreamed that I held a "straight flush"—whatever that may be—and won Percy Earle from Lou Allison!

To-day I have been wondering whether Mrs. La Grange knows of Neddie Lawrence's gambling. She is responsible for him, and naturally could not approve of his continuing to live at the pace he has started. Well, I cannot tell her. Although she does not make intimate friends of them, she knows all the people who have taken him up socially. I earnestly hope something will happen to him before he grows much worse, or Mrs. LaGrange may yet devoutly wish she had left him in rural surroundings and to the dissipation of hay-rides and church-fairs. Poor boy! He has fallen among thieves and he does not know it. They wear velvet and diamonds and broadcloth, but they are thieves, although garbed in what custom dubs honest men's clothing. The clothing of gentlemen, the raiment of fine ladies—Take them at the value of their goodly apparel, their mansions, and servants and stocks and bonds. But as for *gentilesse*—honor; the former is out of style, and the latter perverted,

among these people who claim to be the leaders of society. They see no culpability in dragging young men like Neddie Lawrence into worthless existence, and robbing them of the self-respect and old-fashioned honesty they brought from home. It is theft to take money from that boy; for whatever he earns should go to his parents. And it is theft upon his part to play cards when the money he bets is not in his possession.

Percy did a generous act; I am not sure it was a wise one. I wish I felt it would be right to tell Marion. Upon second thought what would be the sense? She adores him already, and to add one more decoration to his beautiful perfections would merely set her heart throbbing more wildly when he is named. It would be kinder in Marion's case, to discover something despicable of Percy and disclose it to her.

Would she turn against him then? Oh dear, no! She does not even despise him for being infatuated with Lou Allison. She cannot, because she loves him; and, superior and incomparable and extraordinary as she is, Marion is but a girl in love, and that is all—which means faithful and worshipping in a woman's unreasoning way.

Jack does not criticise people as a rule; nor

does he gossip. This was his only remark about Robertsons' supper:

"I'm glad, Dot, Mrs. Robertson's mother did not astonish you any more than your face revealed."

Is there reproof in that sentence?

* * * * * * *

I have no idea how many teas I have attended this month. They have been of all sorts and descriptions, from the extravagant entertainment with music and vaudeville performance, to the tea-and-sandwich in an apartment, where the hostess is tired and nervous long before the guests begin to arrive and goes through the hours "From four till seven", in a cruel torture of dread lest the general house-worker gotten up in cap and bibbed-apron and turned loose in the dressing-room as a "maid", may make some startling break before the last callers have departed. I have the most acute commiseration for these hostesses of small means and smaller apartments, who struggle through an affair of this kind, impelled by some unnamed force which urges every woman to "do something" during a New York season. It always appears to me that the sandwiches—as a rule very delicious and much superior to those furnished by fashionable caterers—have succeeded in getting all the woman's nerves chopped into them, and she

stands a wreck in her own home, courageously smiling, while in the raging storm of anxiety engulfing her, the single buoy she can cling to is the reflection produced by those same wondrous, spicy, succulent sandwiches made by her own hands, "The things will surely taste good." When the perfunctory smile vanishes, I cannot help believing that the weary hostess has been assailed by the torturing specter which occasionally appalled Lame Ann if the griddle-cakes were good and Uncle Dalton came to tea with father: "I wonder whether I made enough!" There does not seem to be any mortification quite so painful as not having sufficient food to go around. Even the great Apostle went in trepidation to the Master, when the multitude were many and the loaves and fishes few.

It was not at one of these heroic, pathetic, limited entertainments, nor yet at a colossally large and elaborate "Tea," that Belle St. John gave us such a fright, and I, excited beyond myself and manners, got into trouble with Mrs. Robertson. The house is one of the most fashionable in New York, and yet maintains some vestige of old-time simplicity and lack of ostentation. I went expecting an agreeable time; I was most wofully disappointed.

Jack taboos teas of all varieties—including the beverage itself; therefore I never have his com-

pany at such functions. I shall never forget the first tea which I attended, where the woman giving the tea was the only one I knew. I innocently went by myself, fancying that the hostess would soon make me acquainted with lots of people. Vain thought of trusting ignorance! She said: "So glad to see you!" turned to the next caller, and I stood stranded in solitary misery upon the parquette floor.

I walked to the dining-room, where the two girls pouring tea and chocolate never so much as looked at me, and half-a-dozen women stared as though I had no right to be there. One woman put up a lorgnette and asked her companion, very distinctly, "Who is the small person?" A waiter handed me an ice. Could any one eat it while a lot of women watched every spoonful? Two spoonsfuls were enough for me. I thrust the plate into the hand of the first man who came along, and fled through a door opening into the hall. There I tripped over the corner of a rug which skated perilously upon the slippery waxed floor, and fell prone. Oh, the humiliation of it! A servant helped me up, and protesting I was not hurt, I went blind and dizzy to the carriage.

Pride prevented my rehearsing this episode to Jack. I even worried a couple of weeks for fear some kind, observing acquaintance had witnessed

my mishap, and would courteously inquire whether Mrs. Woodward hurt herself the day she tumbled down at the Jacksons' tea. It was like carrying a sin upon my conscience.

That first experience seems years ago, and I never again went anywhere alone unless I could be certain of meeting people I knew. It was in the most happily anticipative frame of mind that I started out yesterday for the tea where at least the hostess and her assistants would be delightful, even if all the guests were not particularly agreeable. I found the house swarming with humanity, as this woman, with her simple *menus* and decorations, still "draws" a hundred times better than most of the aspiring strugglers who, by dazzling one's senses of sight, taste and hearing, hope to evolve an applauding recognition of the pinnacle attained. How beautifully some social climbers succeed!

Marion LaGrange poured the tea. She was entrancing in a pale yellow gown, at a table where everything was green, white or silver.

"Stay near me, won't you?" she asked, smiling up at me.

"Gladly, only I am in the way. Others also want tea. And the men want to look at you."

"They do not interest me" she said. Percy Earle being invisible, I knew she spoke the truth.

Addie Layton and her husband pressed for-

ward out of the crowd toward Marion. Of course, Addie was ahead in the pushing.

"I'd like some tea—provided it's really hot," said she, as peevish and pouting as her teething baby at home.

Marion pointed amiably to the flame of the alcohol-lamp. Mrs. Layton jerked her classic head in a very ugly manner.

"That doesn't do any good, if you've just poured in cold water. I am not a mind-curist."

Truly, Mrs. Layton could not be anything whatever that would require mind to any appreciable extent.

I hastily slipped off. Mrs. Layton provokes me to say sharp things—rather sharper than her own. It would not do to risk an encounter with her. Jack says I must learn to be discreet.

"Hello! You here?" My aimless wandering about was speedily cut short. It was Belle St. John who greeted me, her cheeks very hectic, her hat a trifle crooked. She had caught me by the arm.

"Come sit down, Dot, won't you? I'm terribly giddy to-day, and the commotion and crowd confuse me."

Shocked at her appearance, I followed Belle into the music-room, deserted at the moment in favor of the superior attraction of tea and sweets and pretty girls in the dining-room.

Side-by-side we sat down on a divan, Belle turning to me with a peculiar gesture of impatient suffering. I had had no private conversation with her since the day she pawned her ring, and a certain severity lingered in my feelings towards her.

"Do I look strange?" Belle asked, pushing back her hat. Perspiration stood in drops upon her forehead, and the hair trailing across it showed dark with moisture. She breathed quickly and audibly, like one terribly excited or awfully ill.

"Belle," I said, earnestly, "what have you been doing?"

"Nothing, I give you my word. I know you mean what have I been drinking? My dear, these people don't even serve punch, as you know. Gad! I wish I had some!"

"I think, Belle, you ought to go home; you look unnatural. What makes you tremble so? Are you cold or what?"

"Oh, Dot, I don't know! I never felt like this in all my life before. Is my hat on straight?" She struggled with trembling hands at her hat, and the disordered hair about her forehead. "Dot!" in a desperate voice, "Get me home, can't you? Oh, dear! What will people think? I'm sure I look hideous. But I can't help it—No, I can't stand up. Oh!"

Belle gasped, leaned forward, clutched my gown, turned ghastly pale, and then my heart fairly stood still at the gurgling sound which came from her throat. In another instant a warm red stream poured over her white satin waist. It was the most dreadful thing I had ever witnessed, and as I caught the woman, fainting from fright at the sight of blood, I gave a short, stupid scream. An alarm of fire could not have been more tempestuously received. People ran in from the drawing-room, the dining-room, the hall. Everyone exclaimed at the sight of Belle, and most of them, having rushed in through fright and curiosity, rushed out through pitiful horror and dread that Belle was dying.

"Help me," I said, as I knelt supporting Belle's weight against my shoulder. "She has fainted. Can't you see?"

A woman laughed hysterically, another wailed; "Oh, let me out! I never could bear the sight of blood.'"

"What is it? Let me pass!"

Oh, how blessed is man—at times! Over the frantic heads of panic-stricken women, I caught sight of Percy Earle's head and shoulders. I was ready to collapse, when his voice reanimated me.

"Percy!" I cried, never knowing till Mrs. Robertson sneeringly told me of the fact, that I

had not said, "Mr. Earle." "Quick! I can't hold her much longer."

Would anyone believe it? Along some lines, the evolutions of civilization leave much to be desired. Greater intellect, a higher nervous development, smaller hands and feet, are now the endowment of the average woman of education, compared with her sisters of the savage tribes. What a wretched pity that the improvement and betterment do not extend to the heart! Quite on a par with the femininity that pokes spikes into Indian prisoners, and tears off their finger-nails, are women like Mrs. Robertson, whom, as Percy lifted Belle and laid her upon the divan, I distinctly heard say:

"How much more interesting had it been Lou Allison!"

I tottered to my feet, Percy assisting me.

"Here is Dr. Stanton," said a sweet voice we all knew. "He was just leaving."

It was Marion who had brought him, while the rest exclaimed and had faints and hysterics. The stately old physician bent over Belle, and she murmured something weakly. Percy had turned to Marion.

"You are an exceptional girl, Marion," he said, heartily, "to have kept your wits and brought the doctor."

"I knew he was here, for he had been talking

with me," she said, simply. "Oh, here is Mrs. Blashfield, and I think all the rest of us should go."

Mrs. Blashfield, the hostess, who had been entertaining a couple of elderly clerics in the library on the other side of the house, had only that moment heard of Belle's hemorrhage. She came in very anxious, but composed and helpful and motherly. Dr. Stanton ordered us out of the room, with the exception of Mrs. Blashfield. I went silently with the others, although I meant to remain in the house until Lou Allison should arrive. In the hall I staggered. Marion put her arm about me and told Percy to bring some wine.

"I believe you are right. Mrs. Woodward needs it."

People were leaving—rather hastily in most instances—while a few lingered, whispering, in twos and threes. Mrs. Robertson followed Marion and me into the library.

"I always thought Belle St. John was consumptive," she said, aggressively, "and now there's proof of it."

I was choking with anger over the remark she had made when Percy Earle came to Belle's assistance, so I refrained from answering. Marion replied in her gentle manner.

"This could not be considered proof, Mrs. Robertson."

"Oh, you know better than I do, do you? Well, we shall see. No woman could stand the life Belle leads, for long."

Percy and a waiter with some wine were coming. I spoke hurriedly and in anger:

"Most of her life is spent in your company."

"If Belle asserts that," purpling apoplectically, "she very much exaggerates. Allow me to remark that I never found anyone who didn't bore me at the end of two hours."

"Except when you gamble."

Mrs. Robertson drew herself up and towered wrathfully above my figure, while mortification for my rudeness seemed to cause me to dwindle into downright insignificance.

"The spy is a strange rôle for a lady to assume," she hissed, clenching her hands.

"I sincerely apologize for my remark; and I expect an apology for your last." My cheeks burned and the tears came to my eyes. Lame Ann always said I had a bad temper.

Percy touched my elbow.

"You don't look now as if you needed the wine, Mrs. Woodward," he said, a good deal of surprise in his face.

"No—She has her full allotment of nerve," exclaimed Mrs. Robertson, and with that sailed out of the room.

"Leave the tray here," Percy told the servant.

"You're right, Mr. Earle, I don't need the wine. I lost my temper, that's all."

What would father have said? It is not true that a lady never forgets herself. She does, if the provocation be greater than her power of self-control. I am more quick-tempered than most people, and no amount of ladyhood would keep me impassive when my feelings are in a wild ferment.

Simply Mrs. Robertson asleep would irritate me; and Mrs. Robertson awake, aroused, belligerent, almost brings on hydrophobia. If I were a washer-woman, I should pound her with my fists. Being Mrs. J. Worthington Woodward, née Gretchen von Waldeck, pugilism does not claim me, but a biting tongue does. Oh, woe! Is this one more proof that the feminine tongue is the last member to come under the beneficent influence of civilizing education? My arms hang limply, decorously, when I am angered; my tongue is still the savage, and it strikes!

Percy chuckled at my acknowledgment of loss of temper.

"The other one seems to have done the same." He was laughing a little. "I'm sorry you've had to go through so much."

Painfully near a crying-spell, I kept the tears from falling by refusing to blink. As a child, I had always found this a first-rate plan.

"Belle is better," Percy continued, tactfully changing the subject. "But Dr. Stanton says she can't be moved for forty-eight hours."

In spite of my effort, I blinked, and two big tears ran over. Fumbling for my handkerchief, I reflected helplessly that it was in my card-case, which I had dropped somewhere after Belle fainted. Percy Earle divined my dilemma, and gravely produced a nice fresh silk one, heavily embroidered in the corner—no doubt by Lou Allison's fingers. I hastily dried the two big drops, and giving the handkerchief back to Percy, recovered my voice and dignity.

"It is too bad the hemorrhage happened away from home," I said, smothering a sniffle, "and very hard upon Mrs. Blashfield."

Percy Earle sighed absently.

"Quite natural that it did," he returned, in a low tone, "as Belle rarely stays at home, poor girl!"

"If it had occurred in the street!" I shuddered, that miserable morbidness that taints humanity, suddenly dominating me and evoking the vivid picture of an "It-might-have-been-worse!"

Percy Earle glanced at me in quick surprise.

"There's no use of calling up painful possibilities. Sit down, Mrs. Woodward. You've lost all your color."

The recollection of the warm red stream which poured over Belle's beautiful white blouse, overcame my pride of being above a faint. The room began to whirl; I reached blindly for the glass of wine, staring at Percy through an apparent water-fall; then from the depths of a black cloud he spoke to me, but I was falling down, down, and could not understand.

When I regained consciousness, I had forgotten all the events of the afternoon, and wondered why my hair was wet, and Marion LaGrange knelt beside me with a dripping handkerchief.

"What ails you, Marion?" I asked.

"Nothing, dear. You fainted, that's all. Lou Allison has come, and she'll stay with Belle. Percy and I will take you home."

Marion shines brilliantly in trouble; that is the one reason why I sometimes succumb to a choking fear that joy is never to be her portion. The moment others grow limp and helpless, Marion is animated by heroic courage and the physical endurance of a strong man. I believe if Belle St. John had died, and all the people at the tea had bolted, Marion would have quietly closed the eyes of the dead, and then telephoned for the undertaker. And the beauty of the whole is that Marion would never have alluded to those who decamped, nor have understood that she was

exceptional. Of course I did not think of all this as I came out of the faint; I merely felt comforted by Marion's presence and her tender bathing of my swimming head. Percy Earle was standing back of her, and he stooped down to put the glass of wine to my lips. I sat up and drank the sherry gratefully. As I did so,Lou Allison, deathly pale, with lips and hands trembling, came in. She had taken off her hat, and a maid's apron, stained with blood, hung over her frivolous-looking embroidered chiffon skirt. She went directly to Percy, and taking hold of his hand, spoke with blue lips:

"Dr. Stanton has to leave now, and I need you, Percy. There is no other man to depend upon."

I stood up and tried to smooth my hair. Lou stared as she recognized me.

"Oh, Dot! You were with Belle, weren't you? Didn't you think she was dying? I am so frightened! She never had one before." Lou was indeed greatly discomposed. I went and kissed her impulsively, for I know she dearly loves her sister. She clung to me for a moment, as children do in the dark.

"If it should be death!" she whispered. "I never could stand anything about death." Her lips quivered piteously, and looking up at her, I had a sensation of physical chilliness. Cold death, lonely death, the mysterious change each

must undergo as a solitary personality; no warm handgrip, no hot tears of sympathy, no earthly voice to help—its awfulness gripped at Lou's pleasure-loving heart and crushed it into an insignificant, suffering atom, rebelling at its inexorable, irremediable fate. I have heard Uncle Dalton preach several times every year upon death, and I always believed that for me dissolution held no terrors. It was with an odd disappointment I realized that Lou's despairing mood had infected me. Mutely I turned to Marion, no syllable of comfort coming to my lips.

"It's not death," she said, soothingly, that impersonal elation lurking in her eyes, "Come, Dot, I've a maid waiting in the hall with our wraps. Your carriage is the only one left, and I am going to take you home."

"I can do that," interposed Percy Earle, "and return immediately."

Lou turned to him, angrily.

"You won't leave me at such a time?" she said, the blood rushing back to her lips, and the fear in her eyes giving place to reproachful command.

Percy met the look and answered it.

"If I am needed here, Mrs. Woodward will, under the circumstances, excuse me," he said, inclining his head to me in that graceful, easy way

which the girls rave over as his "finished manner."

"Certainly," I said, brought to it unwillingly. A maid rushed through the hall and, knocking as she entered, darted toward Lou.

"If you please, Mrs. St. John is crying and wants you. The doctor left some time ago, and Mrs. Blashfield's afraid the excitement of crying will bring on another hemorrhage." The girl, like most of her class, gloated over the importance of her lugubrious message.

"Oh, mercy!" exclaimed Lou, paling again. "Come with me, Percy. I am frightened to death!"

Marion put on my wrap,

"Mercy—Percy," I said, vaguely; "they rhyme, did you notice?" My eyes were fixed upon the two figures I could see between the portières going up the wide stairs. "Oh, Lou stumbled! And she's going now with Percy's arm around—"

Marion laid her hand over my mouth. She was smiling caressingly but there was repression in her fingers.

"It's time for us to go, Dot," she whispered, a catch in her voice. She had turned her back upon the staircase.

I snatched her hand down from my mouth and squeezed it. I longed to say everything, and

something paralyzed my tongue into heart-sick silence, as we gazed at each other in sorrowful comprehension of our unspoken thoughts.

"Don't!" said Marion, at last. "I can't bear pity, Dot."

That is the most she has ever acknowledged to me. I sighed forlornly as I followed her out of the house. It was as though I had seen Percy Earle married to some other girl, or carried out dead. Everything seemed over. Perhaps, I reflected, Belle was going to die, and this was a premonition. Lame Ann always had one—according to her own assertion invariably made the day after the occurrence—before every event in Graytown important enough to warrant the intervention of unseen powers. Father diagnosed the "premonition" as "violent indigestion", but I never have indigestion.

On the steps under the awning, a short man was leisurely coming up.

"Why!" he exclaimed, stopping in front of us. "Is it all over, that you are leaving, Marion?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Allison," I hastily answered, courageously throwing my premonition overboard. "She won't die. But Lou and Mr. Earle are staying to help Mrs. Blashfield."

Mr. Allison stood staring at us. Marion understood.

"The tea ended suddenly, Mr. Allison, because Belle St. John became ill. She will have to remain here for two days. Lou is with her, and Percy Earle stayed. Mrs. Woodward was with Belle when the hemorrhage occurred, and she is so shocked and tired that I am taking her home."

Mr. Allison gasped once, and when Marion had finished he blinked two or three times. His voice did not come immediately.

"It's strange and most unfortunate. Let me put you into the carriage." Mr. Allison was already himself. Quite as usual, he stepped in front of the waiting footman, and made us comfortable, parting from us in his formal way. Marion and I must have had the same thought.

"Mr. Allison was a little upset," she said, musingly. "I never before saw him so."

"Do you believe he could ever be rash or impulsive?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. I've often fancied, Dot, that he hadn't any feelings whatever, and yet, perhaps he's one of those still waters that run deep. In short, don't ask me."

A thick fog was upon the city, and the electric lights shone through a blur. Still there was light enough for me to see Marion draw in her lower lip and bite it, as if regretting her remark.

"You don't like Mr. Allison," I said, quickly.

The noises of the street and the mud spatter-

ing the windows were the only sounds till we reached home. In the house, Marion spoke as though answering my accusation.

"I think a man should be master."

"And that Mr. Allison—"

Jack appeared upon the scene and I broke off. "Hurry, girls. Dinner will be announced soon, and I'm famishing."

"Oh, Jack! Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what, little one?"

If Marion prefers emotion in others, while aiming to be, against her nature, adamantine herself, Jack must have reached her ideal. He suggested going to Blashfields' without the dinner for lack of which he was perishing.

"Oh, no, no!" I cried. "We'll have dinner served at once, and Marion and I won't change our gowns. *Please*, Jack."

He gave in, and we sat down three very subdued individuals. Jack left us after the soup. Marion and I remained at the table, nibbling bits of bread and celery and thinking of the things we generally make a point of forgetting; horrible things, ghastly things, and such sternly true things, which we mostly leave religiously alone and undisturbed in the limited and sacred precincts of our Bibles and Prayerbooks. If they were oftener taken out and used, familiarity might blunt their sharpness, warm their chilli-

ness, even soften the undeniable awfulness about the facts of life—so uncertain; and death—so sure!

Had we been at home in Graytown, Lame Ann would never have continued serving the dinner. What is the use of making a pile of dishes to wash, if nobody eats anything? Such procedure is sinful extravagance of labor.

Both of us jumped when the door bell rang—"stuttered," I always want to say; it is a much more appropriate word for the performance of an electric button—Which proves how nervous we were. Generally I never notice the bell.

Marion listened alertly, her lips parted, her head turned toward the open door. It was not the voice of a messenger-boy nor a servant.

"It's Mr. Allison," said she, sinking back into her chair. Distinct disappointment was in her face. She must have hoped it was Percy.

Mr. Allison came to the dining-room, and I sprang up to meet him, almost afraid to ask how Belle was.

"Belle is no worse," he said, taking the chair the butler offered him, "but pitifully weak. May I have some dinner, Mrs. Woodward?"

"With pleasure. You look badly in need of it. Give Mr. Allison wine at once, Burton."

"It is quite humiliating, Mrs. Woodward, still I'm obliged to confess that I'm hungry, having

had nothing since breakfast. I tried to bring Lou with me, but she refused to leave, although the trained nurse has arrived. She promised to take some dinner, with Mrs. Blashfield and Percy Earle."

Not a trace of excitement was in Mr. Allison's voice. Marion began to tear a celery-leaf into bits. I wondered anxiously what I should do if she lost her self-control. I have always heard that when these startlingly self-possessed people break down, the results are dangerous, especially when the self-possession is like Marion's, acquired, not inborn.

"Had Jack arrived when you left?"

"Yes, and Belle was extremely glad to see him."

I smiled comprehendingly. Who would not be glad to see dear old Jack?

Mr. Allison ate sparingly. I was grateful to him for making short work of his dinner, because the servants in the dining-room kept me upon a strain, and the relief was delicious when we three got into the library, and Mr. Allison gravely closed the doors. His movements are always oddly like an old maid's.

"I want to speak to you of something, Mrs. Woodward. You don't object to the cigar? Thank you. Sit here, Marion; there is always draught from the window in that corner."

I laughed nervously, watching Marion solemnly obey. Once more Mr. Allison's grave fatherliness impressed me. Glancing at his face, its set whiteness angered me the next instant.

"What is the trouble, Mr. Allison? Your manner freezes my blood. Can't you—oh, dear! can't you get excited?"

An odd expression flitted across his plain face. I looked from him to Marion, and saw her start.

"I found out long ago, that it's better not to be demonstrative."

"That's all well enough. Only you can't make me believe you're quite as calm within." I was extremely irritated.

Mr. Allison seemed lost in the enjoyment of his cigar, and I knew that my voice, more than my words, had been very impertinent. The thought quickened my resentment. Marion moved uneasily.

"I've a dreadful headache," she said, rising abruptly. "If I should be needed for anything, will you send for me, Dot? I should like to lie down."

Without waiting for an answer, Marion glided to the door, which Mr. Allison opened for her.

"She is a very intelligent girl," he said, dropping into his chair again. "And I would indeed rather have our conversation alone, Mrs. Woodward."

"Yes?" My heart beat wildly. Was Belle dead, and had he been keeping the truth from us?

"You know, Mrs. Woodward, that Belle has a husband—which sort doesn't matter. He is still her husband."

"Yes," I repeated, this time affirmatively, although surprised at the turn Mr. Allison's words had taken.

He laid his cigar in the ash-receiver.

"There is every probability—I speak confidentially—that Belle has tuberculosis, and the quickest kind."

I gripped the arms of my chair; that sickening faintness was overpowering me again. As long as I live, I shall never forget Belle in that hemorrhage. Through a gathering dimness, I saw Allison rise hastily. The next moment his voice, coldly courteous, angered me into full consciousness.

"I beg your pardon; let us change the subject, Mrs. Woodward. Shall I call Marion?"

"No!" I fairly screamed. "Go on! Only don't expect me to be like you—or Marion."

"That's better," encouragingly; "I've often found that a little temper is salutary. It's only the mighty ones that are deplorable. Mrs. Woodward, you don't know all the circumstances, you are a good deal younger than any of us, and can dare much more. If Dr. Stanton will per-

mit it, and Jack doesn't object, will you go to Belle in the morning, and ask her to send for St. John?"

Speechless I stared at Mr. Allison. Not a muscle in his face showed a trace of expression, not an inflection of his voice betrayed any particular interest in what he was saying. Only his eyes, small, indefinitely grey, blue, green, squinting a bit under spectacles, gleamed as I had never dreamed they could.

"I ask it for both of them," he continued, after a moment. "It would be so much better if he were with Belle the few months she may live."

"Why don't you send for him, and say nothing until he has arrived?"

"You poor child! I beg your pardon, Mrs. Woodward. St. John took an oath never to return unless Belle herself sent for him."

"She is ill. You could say that," I said, in a low voice. "How can he know she is able to write?"

The next moment I felt myself the meanest, smallest thing in all creation. Mr. Allison turned his gaze from my face and said slowly:

"I abominate falsehood; active, passive or implied."

I blushed vividly: no one had ever accused me of being a liar.

"And I assure you, besides, that St. John

would suffer torture unto death before he would break that unfortunate oath. You don't know him, Mrs. Woodward."

"If he is so awful, will it be wise to bring him to Belle?"

For the second time I wilted under Mr. Allison's words.

"She married him for better or worse, didn't she? She is in honor bound to keep her vows until death releases her from them. And St. John is by no means all bad."

"But how shall I ask her?"

"Leave that to the inspiration of the moment. I'm sure you can do it, and you're the only one."

There was a knock at the door; at the same instant it opened. Both Mr. Allison and I were startled. Crosson asked lamely whether he should not turn off the steam-heat? I recollected him and a tea-tray the day Percy Earle was here, and answered with considerable annoyance that the steam-heat was all right. Mentally I noted that Blackwell should discharge him as soon as his month was up. I like servants noiseless to a reasonable degree about the house. Crosson's noiselessness verges upon that of the uncanny or the sneak.

"I'll attend to the matter, Mr. Allison," I said, in an exaggeratedly business-like tone, intended

for Crosson's enlightenment. "Will to-morrow be the best time?"

"I fancy so. Believe me, the matter is most urgent."

Crosson having departed, I began eagerly:

"You don't expect me to tell Belle she's going to die, do you? I couldn't do it."

"It's odd nobody wants to do that, not even the ministers. And yet we're all so sure of the event sooner or later! You can leave that out, specifically: for after all, Belle may, with care, improve. Just ask her in your own natural way whether she would not like her husband here to help nurse her—Oh, anything that comes into your head! You'll surely succeed in suggesting it some way or other."

"I don't know about that: Belle doesn't like me."

"Who told you so? I'm pretty sure she does."

"No, she couldn't: I've scolded her, and refused to do her a favor. It was against my conscience," I added, unguardedly, and, I believe unintentionally treacherous in my explanation.

Mr. Allison lit a fresh cigar.

"I'm glad you refused the favor," said he.

"Why? You can't know what it was!" I exclaimed.

"There are some people who are unfortunately very observing; they miss even trifles. Not a

pin or a ring escapes them." Mr. Allison nodded at a small stick-pin I had in my stock, and not for my life could I have said whether his choice of "trifles" was accidental or deliberate.

"Now, Mrs. Woodward, you are worn out, and I beg you to retire. With your permission I'll wait here for Jack. In the morning try to go to Belle, won't you?"

"Yes. But won't you be bored, down here alone?"

"No, I'll read. Good-night."

Mr. Allison went to the foot of the stairs with me. I had a question upon my tongue which I did not put to him. It was about his powers of observing his wife and Percy Earle.

Whenever she came to visit me, Marion slept in a small room next the boudoir; I made this arrangement so I could run in to see her at any time, without going through the hall, my room connecting with the boudoir on the other side. To-night I went to Marion's room from the stairs. She did not answer my knock.

"Marion! Are you there?"

"Oh, yes; but go to bed, Dot."

Of course I went in at once. The lights were out, but through the windows came the illumination of electric lights on the Avenue, and I could see her sitting listlessly in the rocking-chair. Her black hair was in a long braid drawn for-

ward over her shoulder, her feet were bare, and, although the room was very chilly, she wore nothing warmer than a night-dress.

"Marion, where are your slippers? Are you trying to make yourself ill? Get your Kimono or jump into bed."

Marion pulled me down to her lap, wrapped her arms around me and began to rock.

"Poor little Dot! You must be desperately tired, or you wouldn't be so cross. I'm terribly healthy, and I never take cold. Don't worry!"

Marion pressed her cheek to mine and holding each other closely, we rocked for some time in silence.

"Did Mr. Allison go?" she asked, at last.

"No; he's waiting downstairs for Jack."

"How queer!" she exclaimed.

The next minute Marion burst into tempestuous weeping with her head dropped into my neck.

I stood it for a few minutes. Then I went to pieces, and we vied with each other in sobbing and moaning. We were both in hysterics, although I never would have conceded it possible for me to be guilty of anything so foolish. The first paroxysm over, we began to console ourselves in the peculiar fashion of women.

"Jack's going to stay all night," I began, fearfully.

"She must be much worse," supplemented Marion.

"It's odd Jack hasn't telephoned." I ended this on a high broken note, and went off noisily again.

"Perhaps—" gulped Marion.

"Perhaps what?—Don't torture me."

"Perhaps Jack started and has met with—" Marion fairly whooped like a child with genuine whooping-cough. I clutched her and finished her sentence.

"An accident? Don't Marion, don't! O-o-o-oh!"

"Dot," severely, "you have hysterics! Stop!"

"You stop first! I never should have had them if you hadn't begun. And I thought you so ca-a-alm!"

"If you act like this now, Dot, what would you do in real trouble? For instance, if Belle died?"

"It's much worse to see some one have a hemorrhage than to see some one only dead."

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" screamed Marion, laughing wildly. "How can you say such awful things!"

"I didn't say anything awful," indignantly; "and your laughing when death is in the family is wicked."

"The doctor said Belle wouldn't die." Marion

was beginning to come to herself. "Dot, haven't we been talking nonsense?"

"I don't know," I said wearily, fresh tears coming. "Jack hasn't come home, and it's late, and Belle is awfully sick—"

"There, there! Run down and telephone, dear. And say Mr. Allison will start at once to relieve Jack, so he can come home."

"You clever thing!" drying my eyes. "I'll speak to Mr. Allison first, and get him off right away."

Marion kissed me tremulously.

"Dot," she whispered, hesitatingly, "you won't tell anybody—I particularly mean Jack—how excitable I am, when—when the reserve I struggled for years to attain breaks down? Will you promise?"

"You dear, beautiful simpleton, I'll never tell. But why Jack specially?"

"Oh!" a little embarrassed—"Jack might tell —other people, you know."

"Who would be glad to hear it, I believe. Let me go downstairs now; I am really anxious about Jack. And, dear, put your ice-cold feet in bed."

I was half-blind as I reached the hall, between the change from the dimness of Marion's apartment into the brilliant light, and my cried-out eyes. I stumbled down the stairs, and went to Mr. Allison in the library. He sprang out of his

chair at sight of me. I must have been a very startling picture, with my red face and crazy head.

"Mrs. Woodward! Are you up yet?"

"Yes, I'm worried to death about Jack. Won't you go to Blashfields' and stay there, so Jack can come home? He didn't say he'd stay all night, and I'm anxious."

"You are right," Mr. Allison said, slowly. He put his book back into its place. His manner was that of one plainly seeing a duty and struggling against an aversion to it. I do not believe that any amount of illness or death could phase him. Strong as he is mentally, he is certainly weak at that one point, not mental, but of the heart, where Lou is concerned. For an instant he appeared to brace himself—It must have been to meet Lou with Percy Earle.

"If you go there," I continued, "you'll have Lou, and I'll have Jack."

"Ahem! Yes—You'll have Jack."

Mr. Allison turned from the book-shelves to me, and smiled cheerfully. I gazed at him wonderingly, the pain in my eyes and head seeming suddenly more intense, and rather inclining me to miserable silence unless speech were a necessity. As for an answering smile, that were too vast a work of supererogation. I was tired, worried and wretched.

Every one cannot be girt and ready for the fray in an instant—like Mr. Allison. Had I been utterly mistaken in the idea that his voice contained a note of deep and bitter sadness? It would seem so. As he still stood smiling, I at last made an effort to say:

"Really, I wish you'd go at once. And I'll telephone Jack besides. I must find out whether he's all right."

"An excellent idea! Good-night, Mrs. Woodward."

We stood together at the library door, Mr. Allison bowing over my hand, when Crosson rather hurriedly passed us in the hall, ostentatiously carrying a lamp-extinguisher. An expression of my childhood, one for which father frequently chastised me, rose to my mind, although I could not have definitely told why: "Drat that man!"

It seemed an eternity before Central gave me the Blashfields' telephone number.

"I wish to see Mr. Woodward at the phone."

Another long wait. I almost danced up and down.

"Yes? Who is it?" Evidently Jack did not know it was I! Such a voice!

"Dot. Come home, won't you? Mr. Allison will be there in a few minutes, and he'll stay till morning. How is Belle?" I spoke with

particular sweetness, to shame Jack for his gruffness. A woman who is gentle, is almost omnipotent.

"All right, only horribly nervous. I'll come as soon as Allison gets here." What a flattering change of tone! The telephone is the cause of many a revelation. And the soft answer—of a woman—will turn away much wrath indeed—from a man. What good are our texts if they are never practically applied? Surely the Holy Book is for daily use, not for Sunday complainings, alone, when song and organ and euphonious prayers have lulled and numbed us into over-tranquillity, and its wholesome admonitions and plain lessons cannot rouse us into a sense of their being personally addressed to our own admirable selves.

"Is—" I paused. How could I ask Jack if Percy Earle was still there? "Jack, is—I mean—are you the only man in the house?"

"Outside the servants—yes. What a question!"

"I am so glad! Come soon. Good-bye."

I hung up the receiver and flew to Marion. The angelic soul was on her knees praying, her head buried in the bed in the most contrite, reverent fashion, which I did not scruple to disturb.

"Marion! I beg your pardon, but Percy's not

—Dear me—that is, Jack's the only man at Blashfields'."

Marion lifted her head and remained kneeling.

"I was saying my prayers, Dot."

"Yes, I know." I pressed the button which controlled the lights, and the room was brilliantly illuminated.

"Dot, what are you doing?"

"Oh, please get up and let me look at you, Marion. No, I'm not crazy, dear. You needn't be alarmed. I wanted to see—yes, it's back—your look of bright serenity. Only you have red eyelids, and your nose isn't quite as aristocratically pale as it ought to be. Tell me, Marion, is it praying that makes you so superior a being?"

Marion stumbled to her feet, and walked silently to the electric button. Turning off the lights, she spoke, for her rather haughtily:

"Dot, please go to bed and permit me the privacy of my room. I don't think you're a bit kind this evening."

I was crushed. Marion was not jesting. Suddenly I had a comprehension of her humiliation because she had broken down with me. Ah! Marion, with all her sweetness is mightily proud!

"Good-night, dear," I said, going without kissing her.

"Good-night, Dot. Wait a minute."

She came after me and put her arms around me.

"Don't be angry, Dot; I'm only cross and disappointed with myself. You're a darling."

A kiss, a push at the shoulders, and Marion had shut me out. Then she laughed from behind the closed door, and I went slowly to my room, too weary and dull to be angry or worried or anything else.

Perkins was pacing the room when I entered it. I fancied she had resorted to the exercise to keep awake, till I found her hands shaking as she undressed me, and glancing at her saw that she was crying.

"Are you ill, Perkins?"

"No, Madam."

It was a vast effort to interest myself, but Uncle Dalton's voice seemed to float through the air, saying "Christian sympathy," and I bravely proceeded to ask:

"In trouble, then?"

"N—no—That is, yes. Oh, it's nothing, Madam. Only my husband who hasn't let me know where he was for fifteen years, is writing now to his loving wife for five hundred dollars! Oh, Madam, human beings is very strange things!"

I yawned sleepily, "Very strange things!" The woman had voiced the cry of my heart, the

cry which had been mine now for nearly two months.

"Yes, Perkins," I said solemnly, "you're right. Human beings are the strangest things in all the world. Don't be surprised at anything."

I got into bed, repeating the advice to myself. I intended not to fall asleep before Jack came home, but the words turned themselves into a refrain—"Don't ever be surprised—ever be surprised—at anything—" which was soporific in its rhythm, and I weakly succumbed.

* * * * * * *

"Sit here by Mrs. Woodward till she wakens. She was very restless all night."

It was Jack giving Perkins instructions.

"Jack! I'm awake! How's Belle?"

"Much better. Don't get up, dear."

"Yes, I shall Jack—and at once."

"You seem to have wakened cross."

"Not at all; I've something important to attend to. Run along now. I'll soon be down, and I'll tell you all about it."

I was rather nervous at the prospect before me. Perkins was clumsy and nervous too, particularly in the arranging of my dreadful mop of hair. No wonder Jack laughed teasingly when I at last appeared at breakfast.

"If this be soon—" he began.

"Don't!" I said, beseechingly; "I'm very serious, Jack."

"Oh, I'd rather you were frivolous. It's more in character with the shape of your face."

I drank my coffee and said nothing; it was cruel joy to me that the coffee scalded my mouth.

"What is it, darling?"

The servants were momentarily invisible, and Jack atoned for his naughtiness by the dearest voice in the world.

Setting down my cup, I straightened importantly.

"Jack, it's only fitting that Mr. St. John should come home to his wife."

Jack gazed at me in wonderment. My next remark rather marred the effect.

"Mr. Allison says so."

"Oh! Well, Dot, what have you to do with the matter?"

"I'm going to see Belle—if you don't object—and ask her to cable him to come home."

The cable was my original idea. The Post to Europe would not be quick enough in this matter. It was exactly like Allison, I reflected, to suggest a slow way of encompassing anything.

For some seconds Jack did not speak. He sat frowning, apparently at some object to be seen from the window. Watching him, I became lost in the contemplation of his fine profile.

"Jack," I breathed, "what a lovely nose yours is!"

He started and the frown faded into a broad smile.

"Dot, do you know what you were speaking of two minutes ago?"

I was very much mortified. My short nose is to blame for my abnormal interest in that feature.

"Of course I do. My mind only wandered for a single instant. Tell me, may I go to Belle?"

"I am considering, little one. What will you say?"

"Don't know."

Although my heart was beginning to fail me, I spoke nonchalantly enough. Jack's frown returned, and he sat furiously pulling his moustache. No encouragement apparent, my heart failed more, and I, as women will, took refuge in a reproachful tone:

"You don't seem to have much faith in my ability, Jack."

"I'm afraid, dear, that your task won't be a pleasant one. Have you finished? Come, let us walk over together."

It was so absolutely and unadulteratedly mannish—to take me up at my word without any objection or argument to speak of—that Jack's sudden acquiesence made me give a feminine

gulp and gasp of protest at the calm command to do what I had expected to be indignantly forbidden. According to my understanding of the case, Jack and I ought to have had quite a lengthy scene first, his ultimate consent to my proposition being the direct result of the most patient and self-controlled eloquence. As matters eventuated, I was to go the minute I finished my breakfast, and Jack's decision influenced me to the extent of my leaving the table at once, oblivious—till a couple of hours later—of the fact that I had not eaten half enough. Meekly and dutifully I hurried into street things. Hardly ten minutes had passed since Jack's ultimatum, when we were on the way.

Jack strode most unkindly and thoughtlessly, and almost gasping I reached Blashfields'. The house was ominously still—a painful contrast to the gay, noisy scene of yesterday.

The man who went upstairs to inquire, said we could go up at once. Mrs. St. John was very comfortable. I turned to Jack, trembling a little.

"Don't come with me," I said, rather faintly. "I'll do better alone."

"Yes, Dot, you will."

Jack pressed my hand, and I turned resolutely to my errand. Perhaps it was lack of experience, but it looked like a hard one to me, and I earnestly wanted to succeed.

Belle was very white and changed. She smiled as I kissed her, and I am sure she was glad to see me.

"Lou's asleep," she whispered. "The first time—she never left me till an hour ago."

"Yes, the nurse said so, and that I must not stop long. You can go home to-morrow."

"Yes, if you want to call it home. It's nicer here."

Belle's dark eyes roved over the beautiful room, and lit for an instant upon each lovely object. I was already at a loss for a congenial remark. Bitterness, covetousness, a savage appreciation of luxury, burned in the sick woman's eyes, and her childish mouth was set and ugly. Suddenly my inspiration came.

"Belle," I said, tightly clasping my hands, "if—if your husband were with you, wouldn't it be possible for you to have more of a home than you have now?"

Recalling the scene and circumstances I wonder that Belle permitted me to finish.

Gazing at me fixedly, she did not move for several seconds. The morning sun, growing higher, sent a ray from under the curtain into Belle's staring eyes. Mechanically I rose and pulled down the shade. While my back was turned, Belle began, rapidly in spite of frequent gasps for breath.

"Dot, I lie here helpless, and you take advantage of me. I dare not get up and strike you, because the act might cost my life. And in spite of all, death is more bitter than the worst life that ever was. I tell you that I'd kill him if I saw him. Do you hear? Lou's house isn't heaven, I allow, but St. John's house was hell."

I stood terrified and speechless. Belle panted and clutched at the counterpane. After a moment she began again, her voice low and piteous, in sharp contrast to her first outburst:

"I was young when I married him, Dot—only a few months older than you are now. And I loved him—loved him almost to the verge of insanity. He cheated me of my happiness, he crushed my pride. He was a beast—and my kind friends said: 'I told you so.' Now they think I am dying, do they? And they want me to call him back."

Belle turned her head away from me, her last words dying into a faint murmur, almost like one thinking aloud. Involuntarily I dropped to my knees beside the bed, hiding my face in Belle's pillow. To my chagrin I discovered that I was crying. Belle apparently took no notice. A stir in the next room brought me to my feet.

"Mrs. St. John must not talk too long," said the nurse at the doorway, with professional importance.

"Mrs. Woodward will go in five minutes," Belle returned, haughty rebuke in her voice. The nurse disappeared.

"Good-bye," I said, faintly; "I hope you'll feel much better to-morrow, Belle."

Belle pushed back her fluffy blonde hair. An unmirthful smile played about her lips.

"Good-bye, Dot. I shan't die. You will see. Next week, I'll be at it again. Cards and whiskey, and sometimes morphine. Do you shudder? Oh, I'm a hopeless case. Thank goodness, Mrs. Robertson is paid, and I'll start free! She did have a most mysterious debt, herself. I wonder what the deuce it was?"

I kissed the hot cheek and went away without another word. The nurse had a scathingly reproachful expression upon her face as she bade me "Good morning." My heart sank with the thought that her disapproval was just and merited. When, late in the afternoon, Jack was hastily summoned because Belle had had another hemorrhage and was very low, I felt like an executioner. Even Jack changed color. I firmly believe that if Belle had died, I should have lost my reason.

Owing to the excitement over graver matters, I forgot Crosson till evening. Sending for Blackwell, I discovered that Crosson's month would be up to-day.

"Discharge him at once."

"But, Madam—" Blackwell paused, in confusion.

"Send him away at once. I don't care to give an order twice. As he had no warning, pay him an extra month."

"Yes, Madam."

So Crosson is out of the house. It was a very good thing I had that tilt with Blackwell. I no longer find myself becoming paralyzed at the thought of giving her a command. And the whole house is cleaner, so that I shall not be mortally ashamed if Lame Ann comes to visit me. What a salutary example Lame Ann was to me in my youthful years! Not a thing goes awry in this elegant household, not a difficulty arises, that I do not instantly ask myself: "What would Lame Ann do?" Faithful, saucy, defiant, devoted, in spite of frequent battles and daily rebellion, Lame Ann has my tender love and sincerest admiration, and should the promise she once exacted from me—to put up a monument for her—ever come to be fulfilled, I am determined to inscribe thereon her name *in gold.*

Jack did not inquire as to the success of my visit to Belle. That I met him red-eyed and silent was sufficient. Before he left in the afternoon at the news that Belle's condition was wellnigh hopeless, he whispered a few words to com-

fort me. They only added to my trepidation. If Jack were not alarmed, he would not try to console.

It was late when he returned and found me waiting.

"She's all right, little one. Dr. Stanton said the second hemorrhage would have occurred in any case."

In any case! That meant even though I had not gone to Belle. I sighed out my relief. Jack's arm was around me, and considerable of my trouble always evaporates at that strong, reassuring support, anyway. How did I exist before I had Jack?—Ah!—to be sure, I had no troubles then!

"I went with a good motive, Jack. I was thinking Belle might like to forgive as she hopes to be forgiven."

Jack gravely kissed my forehead.

"It's not for us to consider whether Belle has more to be forgiven than we ourselves."

I was humble for a minute. Then I burst out laughing:

"Jack! May I smoke and drink and gamble? And won't you consider at all?"

"For shame, Dot!"

And I kissed his frown away, not solemnly as he kissed me, but teasingly and persistently, until he smiled and said:

"Thank God, Dot, you were brought up in Graytown!"

It seems to me that was enough to satisfy anybody.

* * * * * * *

JANUARY.

ANOTHER year has begun. For the first time in my life an unpleasantly solemn feeling overwhelms me when I repeat that sentence to myself. Last year was the most important of all years for me. In it I met Jack, loved him, and by marrying him surrendered my future into his hands. Only twelve months ago, I did not know of Jack's existence. Could any year contain more enormous changes for me than this one, but just dead and reverently buried? Certainly not—and yet—all Lame Ann's premonitions rolled into one could not equal the dread I have of the near future, now that the holidays are over, father has gone back to Graytown, and I once more face all the contradictions and catastrophes of the lives about me.

Belle did not die. Nor has she changed one particle, except corporeally. She says she lost ten pounds before she was allowed to eat and drink again. It is three weeks since Blashfields' tea, and yesterday Belle went off to a house-party in honor of some one's birthday at Lakewood. The last thing I heard her say at the ferry was that

she would do all right, as Annie had put plenty of whiskey into the trunks.

Lou departed over a week ago upon her journey West. She must have some exceptionally dear friends out there, for her entire summer was passed with them and now she has left with the announcement that we must exist without her for the next month. Jack seemed rather disturbed about her going, and asked her what diversion she might be seeking which she could not find in New York? To this Lou responded, "A perfectly new one, Jack," and laughed very immoderately. Then Jack grew a little flushed and angry, and told her he hoped she would at least leave her address. "Certainly; but you're not planning to write to me, are you?" Jack went out after that and did not return until Lou had gone. I am certain that he intentionally avoided bidding her good-bye.

Mr. Allison is South—shooting things, I believe. They say he is a most wonderful man with guns.

While father was with us, much of my worry vanished. His happy, child-like faith and love, pervading the rather formal and stereotyped atmosphere of the Woodward house, put suspicion and unrest to sleep somewhere in a dark corner, and I began to be almost forgetful of my new dignities and responsibilities.

Father arrived on the twenty-second. That very evening, sitting alone with Jack and me after our half-dozen dinner guests had departed, he asked:

"Are you all ready for Christmas, Gretchen?"

"Hope so," Jack answered, making a face. "I've done the best I know how, still it remains to be seen whether Dot will deem that sufficient."

"It's mean to libel your wife," I said, not wholly in jest: for I am sensitive about Jack's constant endeavor to load me with gifts, as though my desire to possess were something insatiable.

"I don't mean the presents," explained father; "I mean, have you arranged for a tree and all that?"

My eyelids dropped: so tainted am I with matter-of-factness already, that my chief preparation for Christmas has been—outside of purchasing many expensive and fascinating gifts—an order to the florist to put up lots of greens. Be it remembered that this was the first rich Christmas I had ever known, and the novelty of spending money had proved quite intoxicating.

I suppose I am rather in the position of a beggar on horse-back, as Mrs. Robertson did not hesitate to remark to Mrs. Van Voort, when I met the pair shopping. I heard the remark, and Mrs. Van Voorts' giggle and "Sh!". New York

women are, *en masse*, beautiful and clever; they are also, *en masse*, small and contemptible in their treatment of their own sex.

All this does not excuse my loss of much of the sweet poetry of life during two months' sojourn in Swelldom. I concluded, embarrassed, that I am father's unworthy daughter, and meanwhile Jack answered:

"Why, I haven't helped dress a tree since I came home from Heidelberg! It was great fun. We used to go to a little village, where one of the boys belonged; there we cut out paper rings and pasted them in long chains, and the *Hausfrau* gave us little cakes and things to put strings into. That was about all, except the candles. Oh, we had plenty of them, and when the short, thickly-boughed tree set upon a table, was dressed, we lit the candles, pushed back the curtains, turned out the lamp and sang, *Ihr Kinder, Kommt Alle!* That was happiness and peace, fit indeed for Christmas Eve."

Jack paused, his eyes shining, and his thoughts far back in his University days—when he did not know me, I jealously reflected. Still, after all, he could not have interested me to any great extent when I was one year old, so I need not grudge him the happy reminiscences of Germany. Only I never want him to wear that tender, rapt expression about any circumstances

of his bachelor-life in New York. As I watched him, he smiled and continued, father eagerly listening:

"Later in the evening, we boys used to go out and walk all through the village. In every house were the same white curtains freshly washed for the Festival, geraniums and monthly roses on the window sills, and placed in the room so every passer-by might see and enjoy, the Christmas tree on its table; it's home-made ornaments were beautiful in their simplicity and appropriateness, besides being so happily eloquent of the faith and patience in the brains and hands that fashioned them. The whole picture was glorified by the tender light of a hundred candles. Not one house was without the sign of Christmas Eve, not one face hinted that pain and poverty were not seldom guests. Do you know what that little village on Christmas Eve suggested to me, Dot? There was always snow, and the roofs are peaked, and somehow the entire scene was more like a Christmas-card than real existence. I believe I have seen a card with the whole composition—little German houses, with snow on the peaked roofs, probably a moon in a corner of the sky, and in the foreground a window from which the curtains are drawn back, revealing a small lighted Christmas-tree placed upon a table."

Father laughed softly.

"So I have pictured it," he said, "and Gretchen and I have never been without our tree."

"Really? In Massachusetts?"

"Always; even my father in his first year of exile, when New England frowned upon such encouragement of Popish observances." Here father slyly smiled. "The Puritans are not so Puritanical as they once were. I've heard my father tell of how when he first arranged a tree, some fifty years ago, he almost lost the friendship of the minister. As he subsequently married the minister's sister, you may believe that he nevertheless succeeded in proving his Protestantism. You see, the worst part was the wax angel that he put on the top. How about that wax angel, Gretchen? Did you bring it in one of your wedding-boxes?"

"No," shamefacedly, "I forgot all about it, father. And I haven't a tree either." I felt positively depraved.

"Don't pout so, little one," said Jack, patting my cheek. "We'll order a tree in the morning, and we'll get Marion LaGrange to help fix it. We won't dress it till late Christmas Eve, and we'll get up early Christmas morning and come downstairs in the cold, and light our tree and have our presents, as I've heard Addie Layton say her children make her do."

"When the hearts are warm, the room temperature doesn't matter," father said, his cameo profile softening beautifully. "Gretchen and I always had our tree Christmas morning in Graytown, didn't we? And it was cold, oh, very, very cold."

"Yes, indeed it was," I cried, going over to kiss him. "I think nothing short of the wax angel could have fetched me out of my warm bed at five o'clock, to go down into the freezing study."

"Yet the tree would never have kept fresh so long, had the house been over-heated like this one," said father, simply.

Our warm house is a penance to him, which I share to some extent myself. Talk of a hot-house flower flung out into the cold street! It is no less trying to be a field-daisy transplanted to a steam-heated conservatory. Did a daisy reared in a hot-house ever in this world keep its innocent assurance and crisp hardiness? No: it is always a limp, shrinking, uncertain blossom, minus half its allotted petals.

"I'll order a tree in the morning," said Jack, with an air of finality. "And we'll try for a German country Christmas."

Father looked distinctly disappointed.

"What is it?" I asked laughing, for I fancied I knew.

"Would it not be better—couldn't you and I go pick out one, Gretchen?" he asked, almost bashfully.

"Of course," I said, heartily. "Pretend there's no telephone, Jack, and father and I will go and buy our own tree."

"And leave me out?" cried Jack, indignantly.

"Oh, no! I thought you wouldn't care to come."

"You don't know me yet, Dot."

So in the morning we went out, afoot, to look for a tree. Father's natural way of doing things with interest and enthusiasm had happily infected Jack and me, and we had the jolliest kind of a time, choosing and considering, condemning and bargaining. The florists' shops were crowded, most people coming in excited and hurried, purchasing the first thing shown them, and leaving without further words than giving name and address. I recognized three-quarters of these persons as butlers and house-keepers. Of course New York ladies and gentlemen were much too occupied to personally buy Christmas-wreaths. What irony that the richer one is, the more servants one has, the less time one possesses! A woman who goes out working by the day, has the evening to use as she pleases, and Sundays besides. I am sure that in the less extravagant neighborhoods, these women and

their husbands go out to buy a Christmas-tree or wreath, and never dream but they have lots of time to do it. The rich women I know, deputize every possible action to others. I have heard Belle St. John say that she wished to Heaven some other woman could be fitted for her, as it took too much time to get gowns! And Belle St. John is neither musical, literary nor philanthropic. What she does to use up her days, I do not know.

As we left the florist's, our tree tagged and bound, a little flurry of snow was falling. The air smelt refreshingly clean.

"You look well, daughter," said father; "much fresher than yesterday. The snow-air has done you good."

"Yes," said Jack, pulling up my fur collar; "I will call a cab. This snow is unexpected."

"No, no, no!" I answered, quite impatiently "I want to think we're back in Graytown, Jack; and there we never had money for cabs. Oh, I love the snow!"

A tall girl hurrying along past us, her head down against the scurrying snow-flakes, paused suddenly and turned back.

"Dot!" she called, in her sweet, sincere voice. "I knew your voice!" It was Marion, and I was delighted.

"This is my father, dear," I said, breathlessly,

"and I want you to come with us and stop all day, and to-morrow, too. We're going to have a tree!"

"My dear Dot," expostulated Jack, "don't talk so fast. Can you come with us, Marion? We've been buying a tree, and are now upon our way home."

Marion had given her hand to father almost deferentially.

"Thank you, I can't to-day: for I'm going to dress a tree for the Settlement children," she said. "To-morrow, most delightedly."

The wind was beginning to blow in gusts, and to work the snow down into one's neck. Jack, who occasionally forgets that I am a hardy country girl, glanced anxiously in my direction.

"*Auf Wiedersehen!*" said he. "It's too windy to stand here." And we parted, unwillingly.

"She's so good!" I said, to father. "Works hours every day for the poor and sick, and teaches horribly dirty little children."

"And she is how old?" he asked, thoughtfully.

"Twenty. And so clever. Wait till you hear her play! Oh, she works too hard, with her practicing and all."

"Twenty, and works at the Missions! My child, my father used to say that when a young girl takes enthusiastically to works of charity,

she has had an unhappy affair of the heart. She dashes into the effort to assist others because in that occupation she finds a sentimental balm for her mental suffering. Her work is done under a peculiar excitement, and often ends in a pitiful despair."

I could say nothing. Jack was laughing.

"Marion has had at least two offers," he said.

If men, even the brightest, are not dull! What good would fifty offers be, when the only desired one remained wanting?

We were at the foot of the house-steps. Father touched Jack's arm to give emphasis to his words.

"The girl is beautiful," he said, "and at her age should be happy. Can you look at her eyes and mouth without seeing that she is not?"

"Now, really, papa," said Jack, provokingly, "there's only one pair of eyes in the world which interests me."

It was in very good spirits that we entered the house, and even father was grateful for its cozy warmth.

* * * * * * *

Marion came early next day, her mother joining us later, at luncheon. The snow having amounted to more than we anticipated, it was possible to go sleighing in the afternoon. I have discovered that sleigh-rides in New York are

rare events. We found the Park packed to a degree positively dangerous, and I wondered once or twice what would become of us if only one horse in the mass of vehicles and animals should begin to cut up capers. Once out of the Park, I enjoyed myself better. It was interesting to note the infinite variety of sleighs pushed into service. From the most extravagantly appointed, to old painted boxes on runners, they flew by with equal gayety. And as for the occupants, for once New Yorkers seemed a jolly lot who did not keep themselves tightly screwed up in a kind of dignity, which is so unstable that those who indulge in it know the slightest relaxation of pressure would cause it to unwind and collapse. There were unaffected laughter, calls from one hooded, veiled and unrecognizable head to another as perfectly disguised. There was some singing of snatches of students' songs, and among the less elegant equipages, the interchange of good-natured teasing. All these were due to the magic of a rare sport. It seems odd to see people so excessively glad of a sleigh-ride. How often in Graytown have we unspeakably longed for the snow to depart, although between snow and good roads, lay the inevitable horror of thaw!

In the evening we dressed the tree. Father had gone out alone, and found a wax angel with

a blue silk skirt exactly like ours at home: so nothing was wanting. Mrs. LaGrange helped energetically, and Marion was demurely happy. As for father, he climbed the ladder and draped and hung, as in the study at Graytown, happy as a child, and sweetly in earnest about everything. It was with a prayer of gratitude I reflected, that hardly one of our "set," outside of Mrs. LaGrange and Marion, was in town, and there was no likelihood of a disturbing note entering into the present harmony. We decided that both Marion and her mother should remain overnight: for all wanted to save the lighting of the Christmas-tree till morning. Father was to officiate at the distribution of the presents, and we agreed that the servants should come also to receive their gifts from beneath the tree.

"At Christmas, if at any time, we ought to remember that we are all one family," father said.

Would anyone believe it? When we came noisily downstairs in the morning, to meet the sight of the sombre evergreen transfigured into a blazing glory by its two hundred burning candles, our hearts so full of joy and good-will that we should have been temporarily glad to hail a red Indian as a near relative, the only servants who had deigned to appear were Blackwell and Perkins! Not one of the others was up yet. Evidently our well-meant invitation had been

scorned. The servants had no ambition whatever to belong to our "family." Quite disgusted and disillusionised, I told Blackwell she could distribute the gifts to the below-stairs portion of the household when and where she liked—They were to be removed at once from the library where we were gathered.

This incident forgotten, that hour by the tree was very sweet. Jack had been most lavish, and every one of us was laden with remembrances. Father beamed perpetually, spoke little and bore in his face more of the spirit of the Little Child who was born in a manger, than any of us—even intense, visionary, enthusiastic Marion.

Breakfast was late, and most indifferently cooked. Our elevated thoughts came down hard when they sank into bitter, heavy biscuits, and were drowned altogether in the wretched reality of the worst coffee I ever drank anywhere. Six of the servants, including the cook, went to a ball last night, and returned at five this morning. Small wonder they were not at the Christmas-tree! Never in her life did Lame Ann serve such a meal. Blackwell shall hear my opinion.. I am so glad I am not afraid of her any more.

Later there was Church, and after luncheon, music. To be perfectly frank, the music did me more good than the service at St. Clara's. I

mean our own music—Marion's and mine. At church there was much ornate singing, apropos of nothing whatever, all words lost in a confusion of trills and tra-las, and a sermon that was a conglomeration of Socialism, poetical quotations and an egotistic resumé of the good works of St. Clara's parish during the past year. Of religion there was about as much in that discourse as—well, I almost wrote "in Paddy's pig," but that is too seemingly disrespectful, so I will say, in Addie Layton, who sat directly in front of me and spent every minute admiring her brand new Russian sable muff. It is as big as a good sized pig, by-the-way, and represents an investment large enough to keep all the hands of the Mission children warm through the winter.

At four o'clock Marion rose from the piano, where she had been playing accompaniments and singing while I did an Obligato on the violin, exclaiming that she would be late at the Settlement. I had been mentally calling her St. Cecelia for the last hour, yet her ecstatic expression impressed me unpleasantly as she kissed me in the hall. It seems to me that a great many of the Saints must have worried their friends.

"Dear me, Marion, must you go?"

"Yes, Dot. I must try to give some of this sense of peace to others. Wouldn't it be selfish not to go?"

"Ye-es; I suppose so." The thought required digestion.

I slipped my arm about her waist. Even with her heavy jacket, her waist is unhealthily slim.

"Marion, you're too ethereal—in every way. You always give me the idea that you didn't get enough mush-and-milk when you were little."

She laughed nervously.

"I didn't get any, Dot. I hated it. And still I'm very strong. Don't you see how much I can stand?"

Marion's dark eyes were dilated, her cheeks bright red. Father was right; she works under the stimulus of unnatural excitement. I sighed as I told her to hurry back. If Percy Earle loved her, how different Marion would be! I do not believe marriage would leave her much time for Settlements, and that Settlement is killing her by inches, because she is unreasonable in the amount of time and strength she gives to it. With her it is not the quiet acceptance of a beautiful vocation—it is the wild hurry of work to keep from thinking of another vocation for which she yearns. Oh, Percy Earle, I wish I did not like you! You ought to be thrashed for breaking this girl's heart. And Lou—pretty, dainty, wicked Lou—if only she would stay West forever!

Jack came into the hall to see whether I were lost.

Marion was late for dinner. Her flush had died out, and dark hollows were under her eyes; the ecstasy of a few hours back was replaced by weariness and suffering. I wondered crossly whether she had given so much peace to the ragamuffins that her supply had been exhausted. She ate scarcely anything, and talked very little. Jack did not seem to notice, but father and Mrs. LaGrange closely watched her. I almost choked once at the ghastly thought that Marion might be doomed to consumption. In fiction, at least, so many good people are.

"Merry Christmas!" called Jack, suddenly. "What ails you, Dot?"

"One can't be merry all the time," I answered, not very sweetly; for I was provoked at the start I had given.

"No—only happy," said Marion, dreamily. "There's a difference. The angels sang 'Peace and Good Will,' you know: they didn't mention gaiety."

"Being an angel yourself, I fancy you were there?"

I glanced quickly at Marion, for I thought Jack's words might be interpreted either as a laughable compliment or a cruel sarcasm. Marion's good sense saved the hour.

"No—Perhaps I was nearer those of my color." She touched her coal-black pompadour, and father led the laugh. "Really I don't remember."

Jack smoked in silence a long time when we were alone that evening.

"Dot," he began, suddenly, "can you use any influence to keep Marion from killing herself with her Missions?"

"Why?" The question was meant to be evasive.

"Oh! Her mother is anxious."

"Did she tell you so?"

"Yes. I had never noticed how thin the girl was."

"Well—It's my shrewd guess that I should have to see that Marion became engaged."

"To be married? Nonsense. She will enter a Sisterhood."

"All things are possible. However, Marion won't be a Sister." Jack's idea in this matter always angers me.

"How do you know? Is she in love with anyone, Dot?"

"Oh, certainly not," sarcastically. "Marion will probably go into a nunnery. Haven't you said so?"

"What makes you so cross and so rude?

Dot, if you know anything, I wish you would tell me."

"I know nothing. Father surmises things, and—Jack, father is cleverer than most men."

"No doubt," gravely.

This meek acceptance of my little dig made me ashamed.

"If you please, Jack, I would rather speak of something else. Marion has never given me her confidence, and whatever I think may be entirely incorrect."

"However, dear," said Jack, earnestly, "you might get Marion to eat more, you know, and see a doctor and all that."

I burst out laughing. Dear old Jack, what a dull darling you are in matters of sentiment! Fancy roast beef a cure for love-sickness! And a doctor's serious professional visits in lieu of the stimulus of Percy Earle's society!

"Please excuse me for being frivolous, Jack. I'll do my best for Marion."

Not a suspicion, not a dawning of the truth upon Jack yet—Jack who sees these people almost every day!

My days were one long festa while father remained. Everybody I ever met called upon me, whether I owed her a visit or not, and paid homage, very gracefully, very deferentially, at the shrine of a genuine "Count." The title flew

through the atmosphere at the rate of a dozen times a minute and so unctuously that frequently I almost gasped at the change in the manners of my formerly cool and critical acquaintances. Nor were they content at overwhelming father with adulation: the Count's daughter came in for a rush of compliments and sweetness which would have been very lovely and agreeable, had I not known that the assumption of this attitude was too sudden to be trusted, and too extreme to last.

At times I tried to swallow such remarks as "Your beautiful daughter, Count, has won all our hearts," and "Such talent seldom goes with so much beauty, Count von Waldeck, now really, you know." I found, however, I was not fool enough.

A frightful-looking epistle from Lame Ann unexpectedly took father away from us. With the exercise of superhuman patience towards the vagaries of Ann's brain and Ann's pen, we gleaned that Uncle Dalton had been thrown from his horse and seriously injured. That news caused father to pack at once and rush for the next train to Graytown. I could have shaken Ann when the telegram came from father saying, "Ann exaggerated. Uncle doing well. Very slightly hurt."

Not but what I am grateful that Nunk is all

right. What a stalwart "Man of God" he is, when I compare him with the Curate of St. Clara's! To be appreciated, one must be brought into proper contrast, and Uncle Dalton and that Curate form the most ideal light and shade a master ever drew.

* * * * * * *

Marion came into my room and dropped upon the couch.

I put down the book I was reading, and stared speechlessly, mentally repeating the last sentence I had read, with a vague intention of not losing my place through this unexpected visitant.

"Do you mean, 'When did I come?'" she asked, smiling in a sick sort of fashion as she unfastened her jacket.

"I didn't hear the bell," I said, coming to myself and jumping up to kiss her. "Are you deadly tired or what, Marion dear?"

"Yes, tired, Dot. That's all."

I surveyed her severely plain serge frock and the blue felt sailor. They always bear their own message.

"Your costume suggests the Salvation Army, somewhat," I said, very crossly. "I judge you come from the Mission."

"Yes. What makes you so acrid in voice and

manner? Would you rather I'd been playing bridge?"

I caught her by the shoulders, and holding her back against the cushions, gazed sharply at her.

"I know something about those who play bridge, and so do you; and never before have we broached the subject, you and I alone together. What makes you speak of bridge, now? You know very well that I'm positive you would never take a hand."

The girl laughed uneasily, and her glance fell.

"Let me up, Dot and come play an accompaniment for me; won't you?" Music comes next to praying with Marion.

"No; I don't feel like playing, and neither do you, Marion. Tell me what ails you, or go home."

I let go Marion's shoulders and sat down beside her. She turned her eyes, full of doubt and distress, upon me.

"Dot you know mother had Neddie Lawrence sent to New York?"

"Yes, you told me—He wanted a start."

"Well—" she paused, flushed, threw her head up high and continued in a strangely challenging voice: "He got started on an unfortunate road."

"Oh—I see—bridge!"

"You're laconic—but the one word will cover

considerable of his sins, as they're all accessory to bridge and poker." Marion pressed her lips together, and her sweet face took on an unfamiliar look of severity. "I think, Dot, that several women we know ought to be electrocuted," she said, solemnly; "I think I could turn on the current myself."

A perverse resentment, because Lou and Belle were brought up like Jack's sisters, forced me to respond to this ferocious remark of my gentle Marion.

"That's eminently Christian!"

"I admit it's wicked," she returned gravely, and then sighed with her whole heart. "Poor unfortunate Neddie!"

"You don't mean—Marion, is he in trouble?"

"Yes, Dot, and has been for some time. He asked me for money once, and I gave it for mother's sake, as he admitted he was in the kind of debt he wouldn't care to explain to mother. He promised not to become involved again."

Marion rose and began to walk about the room. Her actions were so unlike her habitual queenly calm that I wondered what would come next.

"He's become involved again and owes a great many people."

I felt a hot blush spreading over my face. Marion had not been at Robertsons' that Sunday

night, nor had she heard and seen Percy when he gave Lawrence a hundred dollars. I had also successfully resisted the temptation to tell her the story. As I sat silent and confused, Marion, cleverer than most, was not oblivious of my embarrassment.

"You know something, Dot," she cried, darting over to me.

"Hardly anything, Marion—Oh, really!—I—I know Neddie Lawrence plays cards for money, certainly."

"And he—" struggling bravely with gathering tears, "drinks to excess—A boy who never tasted wine nor wished to taste it, while he was at home!"

She stopped, biting her lips, and turning away from me. I waited in mute sympathy, and wished that I had Mrs. Robertson there so that I might pinch her.

"Dot, I was talking to the women at the Mission to-day about the evils of intoxication, when there was a sudden commotion at the door. Greatly annoyed, I turned from the class and saw a policeman trying to keep a young man from entering."

The look in her eyes made me gasp:

"It wasn't Neddie?"

"It was—it was—dreadfully intoxicated and

saying he must see his cousin, Miss LaGrange. Oh, Dot!"

Proud Marion! I groaned in horror.

"The women all stood up, staring and laughing, and shouted, 'Oh, get out! Don't yer be afraid of the loafer, Miss LaGrange!' Then Neddie swore and struck at the officer, who took his club—"

At this point Marion broke down completely and sobbed.

"And what did you do?" I asked faintly, laying my cheek against the heaving shoulder. "You poor darling, Marion!"

"I hardly know, Dot. Of course the officer is well acquainted with all those who work at the Mission, and I told him to get the young man outside and wait for me. There was a scuffle; the women enjoyed the scene immensely. I dismissed them as soon as Neddie and the officer no longer blocked the way."

"What on earth did you tell the policeman?" I asked, the disgrace of the whole affair uppermost in my mind.

Marion straightened up and dried her eyes.

"The truth," said she, with dignity. "As soon as I came out he said, holding Neddie by the collar, 'You'll come enter a complaint, Miss, for his disturbin' o' the peace?'—'No,' I answered. 'Neddie, come into the Mission-room

with me.' The policeman seemed electrified. Neddie looked like a whipped dog. 'He is a relative of mine,' I told the astonished Irishman. 'A boy from the country—I'll look out for him.'"

Marion's voice died away; emotion had exhausted her.

"Oh, Marion, you are wonderfully good! I would have sent him to the station-house."

Marion's brown orbs burned me with reproof.

"No—you would not," said she, decidedly; "cowardice would not make a deplorable matter better. The officer understood it. He said, 'God bless you, Miss, you're a good one,' and walked off calling roughly to the Mission women to go home."

Marion is ever beyond me. Generally I humbly admire her superiority. This time some inflection of her voice when she said the "officer" understood, hurt me and made me angry. I rocked very fast; my book slid to the floor, striking the wood part with a thud. Marion politely picked up the volume and laid it upon my knee. I did not thank her, and she wonderingly leaned over and looked interrogatively into my eyes.

"Are you angry, Dot? Why, what did I say?"

"Nothing. You seemed somehow to be preach-

ing. Never mind! What did you do with Neddie?"

"Not much," dejectedly. "He came for money, of course. I had only a couple of dollars with me, and told him so. Then he said he was afraid of mother, and that he must get the money by some means. Poor mother! She thought that Neddie might be like her own son!"

A swift thought brought the tears to my eyes. What must it be to have a mother! I had not known mine. Lame Ann was the substitute I had loved and obeyed. How might I have worshipped that Margaret Dare of whom uncle and father spoke at long intervals with few and reverent words! Some new sympathy, some intangible influence of my dead mother, softened my heart into a burst of emotion, and I found myself crying hard before I quite knew what for. Very remorsefully indeed, I clung to Marion's hand.

"Oh, Marion! I'm sorry I haven't been nicer while you told me these things. I know my life is dreadfully selfish, and I'm not fit to tie your shoe—"

"For goodness sake, Dot, quit! You're the best child that ever lived, and you've had an awful winter, getting used to the wretched people in your set. Don't you suppose I've seen and heard? Don't I know you'll do great things

when you're broken in, as it were, and a little older and stronger? Haven't I seen your trials with the meanness and jealousy of the women who meant Jack to marry their sisters or daughters or cousins? You poor little thing! I'll wager you're ten pounds lighter than when you entered this house as its mistress."

My sobs grew bitter indeed under the encouragement of these words of Marion. Curious that we never realize how much we are suffering till some one puts our miseries into words! There are people who have the inherent faculty of sitting down—out of themselves, if you will—and contemplating and commiserating their own woes. Not being gifted in that way, it took Marion to bring home to me the full sense of my social martyrdom. So I wept heartily.

"Mother and I often speak of you, Dot, and of how well you have stood your initiation." Marion's tone was delightfully sympathetic, and her gentle hands were softly stroking my hair.

I dried my eyes. Marion's words were detaching themselves into groups. One sentence especially reiterated itself persistently in my mind: "Women who meant Jack to marry their sisters or daughters or cousins." Here was the cause of much of the snubbing and sarcasm: I had taken the prize from them. Jack was a "match" of which any woman might be proud. I sighed

understandingly, and a great satisfaction flooded my heart. Was not Jack worth the envy and spite of all the world, let alone a few women who begrudged him and his wealth to me?

In my selfish digression, Marion and her mother and Neddie Lawrence were for a moment forgotten. Marion's rising and adjusting her hat—it was a solidified equation of self-denial, and detracted somewhat even from Marion's beauty, which is of the kind that has no need of frills—brought me back to her distress.

"Marion, if I could only do something! Where is Neddie now? Are you sure he will not go to your mother?"

"I lectured him a little—he was maudlin and disgusting," Marion added, her tone showing that her superfine conscience condemned her for using the word. "All I could accomplish was the solemn promise to go straight to his room. Even then I could not trust him: so I walked uptown with him till I could get a cab and then I took him home."

Fancy stately Marion walking the streets with that intoxicated boy! My heart gave a most indignant throb at the thought. Remembering the "officer" who "understood," I merely asked:

"Who will give him the money?"

Marion looked away, out of the window. In a very low tone, she answered,

"I had the amount in my desk, and I sent it by a messenger-boy with a note saying this was the last time I should help him."

"Was it right to send it?" I ventured, rather timidly.

"I don't know. It's only for mother's sake, and because he was good until he knew Mrs. Robertson and her chums."

Marion's voice trembled with excitement. Her words again stabbed me—Jack's cousin was one of the chums.

"Tell me, Marion—You know many more people than I do—are they all as bad as Mrs. Robertson and—the rest?"

"Oh, don't ask me. Some are very good. Only they seem so few just now! They are few. I cannot help the uncharitableness it may seem to say so."

"I hate Mrs. Robertson!" I said, vehemently. "If she's not the worst of the party, she's the oldest, and has the greatest influence over the others."

"There is no use talking about her. The only thing would be to get Neddie back to the country. But he won't go—of that I'm certain. He told me the country was too dead slow for a man with any sport in him, and that he was having a bully good time, only luck was against him at cards.

Of course, he had no idea how he was talking," Marion concluded apologetically.

"It's all villainous! And, Marion, I should think you'd die at the thought of facing that Mission-class next time."

"I shall not think about it. It was chokingly hard for a few moments, but now I'm over it."

Marion smiled that brave forced smile which I hate, and with a kiss left me. My book failed to chain my interest after she had gone. Neddie Lawrence forced himself in front of the heroine, and meagre as his proportions are, he is so very real and miserable that he eliminated the possibility of seeing the "tall, slender maiden" who played golf, and fell in and out of love most comfortably, from cover to cover. The longer I thought of the case, the blacker Mrs. Robertson appeared. Bridge-whist and poker seemed the very incarnation of crime and wickedness; and for me, Mrs. Robertson was their accredited High Priestess.

My head began to ache wearily. I clasped my hands over my forehead and pressed back the slow, throbbing pain which I have so often lately. Probably the ache comes from the effort of my dull brain to penetrate the absorbing mysteries of the lives about me. I am not good like Marion, and I have no right to denounce other people. Am I simply narrow and ignorant and

limited? Maybe my judgment and criticisms of the individuals I know are more sinful than their card-playing and flirting and drinking. Dear me, I am growing morbid! I know I am, because last night, at the Fortnightly, I suddenly had a ghastly vision of the grave-yard back of Uncle Dalton's church, with its significant mounds under the snow, and for a moment it seemed to me that the gay crowd in the ball room were doing the "Two-Step" over those same grim, cold, white graves. I know I shivered, and Jack brought me a wrap, but the room was melting hot, and I was chilly only through imagination—which kept away the laughter and electric light and the smooth floor, and left me these gayly-dressed people still dancing in the cold moonlight over the mournful mounds; profound silence instead of the music; and for a background the black, motionless pines which used to frighten me at night when I was little and Lame Ann had taken me over to Uncle Dalton's for tea—because father had gone to Boston to spend the day, and she would not bother to get supper for only me.

In the warmth and comfort of my room, I again found myself shivering. Was I going to be ill, or what? I longed for Jack to come home. He had said he would be late; there was some panic in Wall Street, and he would stay as long

as others did. I concluded, lonesomely, that there was a worse panic in my heart, and discovered I was sobbing.

"Oh Jack! Come home, come home!"

* * * * * * *

It was an evening for which we had three engagements, only I had a small cold and a big attack of nerves, so when Dr. Stanton said I had better stop at home, Jack warmly approved. I could not fail to see that he was pleased at the prospect of an evening alone in my society, and I felt much gratified for a while. Dinner over, my throat grew worse, my head began to ache, the blues deepened fearfully, and I presently forgot that Jack's satisfaction about being at home alone with me, was decidedly complimentary and deserving of appreciation. Twice I answered his questions irrelevantly; then Jack sat in silence and clouds of tobacco-smoke for what was probably a good while, because when he suddenly spoke, I very unpleasantly jumped.

"I beg your pardon, Jack."

"You're exceedingly nervous, Dot. What ails you?"

"Nothing—except New York." It was provoking to have started so, and a trifle of acidity might have been detected in my voice.

"Is it so bad as that, dear? In that case we ought to go off somewhere."

Jack had suggested the popular cure for everything in New York. It is a wonder that people who have not the money to go, and are forced to stay, get over things about as well!

"No, I don't want to; we're home so short a time; let's not begin to be wandering Arabs, like the people around us. It seems to me a sin to shut up beautiful big houses and live all over creation. And besides, disagreeable experiences are probably salutary for me."

This heroic sentiment was of the lips, not the heart. Jack tenderly patted me. He is at times delightfully motherly.

"Why dwell upon the disagreeable things? Can't you linger on the pleasant side? Our happiness, for instance?"

I fancied there was a note of reproach in Jack's tone, and sensitive as I have become of late, began inanely to cry.

"Dot, Dot! What am I to do with you?"

Perhaps it was only discouragement, but I thought the question savored of impatience. I believe a cross husband would soon kill me.

"Oh, don't scold me! I can't stand it," I wailed.

"This will never do; I think you hardly know what you are saying." Jack dropped my hand and rose to his feet.

"Oh, what a way to speak to me!" Jack had

never looked as he did that minute, all the time I had known him. While really crying, I was not so overcome but that I could peek through my fingers at him all the time.

"If you were satisfied with me, you couldn't get so down-hearted, no matter what happened." Such a cold, judicial tone from Jack, was maddening.

"Oh-oh-oh!" I threw myself down into the cushions upon the couch, too crushed to think of peeking any longer. "If it were day time I'd go home to father!"

I wonder how many wives threaten to go home to father—"or mother"—every day? And what percentage of these would be welcome to "father"—or "mother"?

"Thank you!"

I glanced up hastily. Jack never swears, maintaining that swearing is a form of cowardice, but he looked exactly as though he meant "Damn it!" He said not a syllable beyond the two words of sarcastic gratitude. I was hurt to the quick and went on recklessly:

"You are quite welcome. I thought you'd be glad to get rid of me." What an insolent lie it was!

I suppose I expected some denial, some pleading and petting. Slowly paling, Jack gazed at me a second or two. I quivered and sobbed

tearlessly, confidently expecting to drop my head directly upon his solacing shoulder. Instead I saw Jack turn upon his heel and leave me. I blinked in amazement. At first I was not frightened. I was only angrier than in the beginning. It was the sound of the hall-door closing that brought me hurriedly to my feet.

"Jack! Jack!" I called, wildly.

It was no use. Jack had gone out. He had run away from me, his wife. I flew to the closet where his hats and coats are kept. Derbys, top-hats, Alpines, visor-caps—Yes, the brown derby was missing. And—my heart stood still—the night was bitter cold but Jack had gone out without a coat. Driven out of the house by me! Oh, what should I do? Why did I not die when I was born? Why had I not rushed after Jack and kept him from going out?—

I returned to the library, and passionately wept. How long had Jack been away? What if he never came back? Or took pneumonia? Oh, he must come now! Where had he gone? I had not meant what I said. How could he misunderstand his devoted wife? If he only had put on a coat? Stout people catch cold so easily, and had I not heard that their hearts nearly always gave out if they contracted pneumonia? Oh, I should go crazy! This was indeed genu-

ine wretchedness. If he did not come soon there would be an end of me.

Unable to cry any longer, I ran into the hall, and paced up and down, straining my ears at every sound, in hope that I should hear Jack upon the steps. How horribly wicked I had been! Had I not tortured Jack for several weeks past by my despondency and irritability? Had I not been lacking even in those outward demonstrations of affection which, while they are not essential to a happy life, certainly help it along considerably? My soul wilted under the misery of the thought that for more than a week I had been too pre-occupied to pet poor Jack at all. Dear Jack, the best man that ever walked this earth! And now he had left me!

A servant appeared. I slipped quickly into Jack's den, ashamed to be caught racing through the hall. Tenderly and with a big lump in my throat, I touched Jacks' ash-receiver and his cigar-cutter. They were precious, they were a consolation, because Jack's fingers so often held them. Faithful, inanimate servants, they had never offended him! Would he ever again use them? The agony of the question!

Hark! The bell had rung. If it should be a caller and not Jack! I would risk it—I must—I was choking with a combination of dread and contrition. The door was opened; no one spoke.

A visitor would be obliged to say something. How many seconds did it take the servant to be out of hearing? Surely I had waited long enough. With a mad rush I darted out of the room, and screamed softly as I found myself caught in Jack's arms.

"Oh, Jack," I cried, clinging to him convulsively, "I was awful, and I am so sorry!"

"My darling! I was a fool and a brute. I ought to be sorry, and I am. You're tired out and ill, and I made no allowance for you, poor child." Jack's repentant kisses fell fast.

"I thought you might never come back," I whispered, fearfully. "Is it hours since you left?"

"Fifteen minutes, dear. Did you worry so much as that? It makes me sick to think how ridiculous I was."

By this time I was on Jack's knee, in the cozy den, rubbing his poor, cold hands.

"What made you go out, Jack? I was naughty, but your punishment was very cruel."

"I thought—Don't make me tell it, Dot."

"Yes, you must. Anyway, I know."

"No, you don't. It was because I thought you didn't care for me any more." Jack's gravity was almost comical.

"That's just what I meant. How could you, Jack?"

I grew silent, struck unpleasantly by a new thought.

"I don't know how I could, except, as I said, because I was temporarily a fool. What makes you so serious now?" He raised my chin and smiled into my eyes.

"Jack," I said, regretfully, "do you know we have had our first quarrel?"

Jack sighed heavily, the smile completely murdered.

"I fear we shall have to call it that," said he.

"Well," earnestly, "let's never have another."

"Agreed, Dot."

And we kissed and were—even if some people may not understand what I mean—solemnly happy for the rest of the evening. Nevertheless I wish we had never had the sad experience of each other's tempers. It could all have been so easily avoided—If either one of us had had a wee bit more patience and common sense! I am positive that many big troubles between husbands and wives commence with some such foolish, trifling things at the start. In my opinion the sweetest "make-up" that ever happened, is not worth the sting, the selfishness and the wretchedness, of a quarrel.

We sat talking till very late, and in spite of an uninterrupted flow of affectionate eloquence, Jack impressed me as having a reserved something

upon his mind, which he fain would communicate.

We had not been long upstairs when out came the matter:

"I met Arnold Allison on the street, Dot."

"Yes," I responded, for Jack paused as though expecting me to speak.

"He was walking so rapidly and recklessly that we collided at the corner. I began to apologize to the supposed stranger when the electric light made us plain to each other." Here Jack hesitated perceptibly, and glanced at me in alarmed haste.

"I—I'm afraid I looked pretty queer, Dot, because, as I mentally noted Allison's pallor and distracted expression, he cried out: 'My God! Woodward, are you getting it, too?'"

I know I frowned furiously. What business had Jack to go out with the advertisement of our first difficulty stamped upon his face? I should rather he would have—Yes, I should—struck me, provided we had been alone, than have an inkling of our foolish quarrel become known to our friends.

"What did you say?" I asked, very haughtily, considering the beautiful humility I had displayed since Jack's return.

"What did I say?" Jack echoed. "Why of course, I asked him what on earth he meant?"

"And he said?" I prompted, much relieved.

"He laughed like a fiend, Dot, and answered that if I didn't know, it must be all right."

"It is all right," I declared, decidedly. "And we'll never be such idots again. Did he tell you what troubled him, Jack?"

"No: he bolted after exclaiming that it was all right." Jack paused, meditating. "Dot, do you know whether Lou has been less interested in Allison than usual, lately? Since she returned from her trip?"

I returned Jack's penetrating scrutiny squarely.

"Lou has been home only a few days. I know nothing new. I fancied you knew nothing, either new or old. As for Allison, I can't make him out."

"Can you make Lou out?"

My glance fell. What should I answer?

"I don't know, Jack." That is the safest answer in all situations and under all circumstances. Only sometimes it is cowardly and half a lie—the resource of social sneaks.

"You must have some opinion in the matter," Jack insisted, pulling his moustache as if his life depended upon the exercise.

"I think, dear, that Lou is charming and fascinating—and devilish."

Jack was not shocked at the last word, much

to my surprise, for he is one of those men who think no ugly word should cross feminine lips.

"You wouldn't trust Lou, Dot?"

"Oh, dear! What do you mean by trust? I'm deadly tired and can't think logically any more."

Jack deeply sighed. Lou and Belle are the same as sisters in his affections, and neither one could be anything but a trial and an affliction to a brother who loved her. I think adoptions are breathlessly risky, even if everyone concerned is in the family.

"We must hope for the best," said Jack, pathetically cheerful. "After all, Allison may have had a bad attack of indigestion this evening. 'It' is enormously indefinite."

I am sure Jack meant me to say that his own guilty conscience had caused him to give a serious interpretation to Allison's words. So far I have not enough conventional polish to instantaneously fill the part another thrusts upon me. The accomplishment is, I allow, a valuable one to those who can (while putting on the external polish) succeed in shading the inconvenient lamp accompanying our reason, and known as conscience: Its light is relentless and pierces through veneer in a manner calculated to daunt the boldest believer in his own shams. Such a lamp must be covered, hidden, extinguished—best of all,

thrown away—when one enters the arena where the prizes of society are awarded. There is light there—plenty of it—glaring, artificial light, which greets artificial polish as a near relation, and bathes it in a blaze of radiance. Only the light which God has given, the lamp which Heaven has filled, conscience, sensitive and clean, is the worst sort of superfluity for the individual entering the contest for social success. If one cannot even fib promptly and to the point, what is the use of attempting anything more advanced? One who does not know his alphabet, must not try to write an essay.

The power for evil in intellect stripped of conscience, is immeasurable. The potency for good in a conscience quickened by the stupidest mind is undoubtedly, at least before God and the angels, also illimitable. Probably I am not at all clever, so let me find consolation and gratitude in the reflection that I possess an abundance of inconvenient old-fashioned conscience.

Jack had waited some time for me to say more. At last he spoke:

"You don't want to discuss the question, Dot? Well, never mind."

Lou is not worth such a deep, deep sigh, as I heard Jack breathe.

* * * * * * *

FEBRUARY.

It was a most forsaken morning, pouring rain, and the side-walks, houses and everything, jet black with the wet. The lights were turned on for breakfast, and a sleepy feeling made us absent-minded and untalkative, as if we had been summoned to the table in the middle of the night. Jack, after somnolency had somewhat decreased, had the absorbing distraction of the newspaper, leaving me to desultorily open notes and invitations, and wonder how many I should have to answer at once. I was so numb and listless that Jack's departure passed almost unnoted, instead of calling forth tender complaints at the cruel order of things which has created a "down-town" to which the majority of men flock every morning—in many cases, I believe, mutely grateful for the obligation.

A victim of late to pricks of conscience induced by long neglect of practising, I roused sufficient ambition to begin some scales upon the violin. One dances to the music of a violin, and I suppose it is therefore capable of joyous strains.

For me it is the best medium for the expression of sadness and loneliness, doubt and dread. I wandered from the salutary scales into a maze of musical scraps, all slow, minor, quivering with misery.

"For Heaven's sake, Dot, quit!"

"Lou! I never heard you. Isn't the weather awful?"

Lou dropped a wet coat and a wetter hat upon a chair.

She did not seem to notice my kiss.

"I believe it is. I hadn't stopped to consider."

"Has anything happened, Lou? And did you walk here without an umbrella?"

"Nothing has happened. Your doleful selection of music exasperated me, that's all. It sounded like Arnold's."

The remark grated upon me.

"Shall we go upstairs?" I asked, coldly. "Probably it will seem less dreary than down here."

I carefully put away my violin, tucking in the silk handkerchief very tenderly. The instrument had responded to my mood. Lou was an inharmonious interruption.

"Oh, no! All places are alike to me at present. And I've been talking to my lawyer for the last hour, so one flight of stairs is too much exertion for my exhausted nerves. Do you know

anything about law, Dot?" Lou frowned whimsically at me.

"No; or at least so little that it isn't worth mentioning."

Lou laughed, much to my relief, as frowns do not become her.

"Oh, well, you won't ever need to know more, most likely. It's immensely interesting. Given a clever lawyer, one can get in or out of anything."

Completely at a loss as to the trend of Lou's thoughts, I made no attempt to refute her alarming assertion. She suddenly darted to the window.

"There goes Mrs. Robertson. I should know her gaudy equipage if I met it in Hades. I say Dot! Have you any idea what goblin has got her?"

"Why?" I asked, putting some music in order.

"She's going around with a set face, and isn't eating anything like her proper rations. Belle had a note from her saying she's dreadfully hard up for money and won't Belle please pay her last winnings at once? Jingo! If I had a rich old idiot for a mother, and she was as stingy as hers, I'd poison her coffee some morning, if there was no other way of getting at the millions!"

"Lou, you're not like yourself this morning."

"Am I not? I'm so glad you have warned me. You see I got weak and tired at the lawyer's and he recommended a high-ball to steady me. So I stopped at Blanks' and had one on the way up. It must have been a very heavy one, because I'm sort of dizzy and can just about recognize people, and that's all. I have," laughing boisterously, "an uncontrollable desire to talk."

A sensation of supreme disgust came over me. Then the recollection of the name Belle St. John often derisively called me, "Pharisee", stung me into repentant patience.

"What a horrid man," I said, endeavoring to give him all the blame, "to advise a woman to drink whiskey!"

"Not at all, dear; the advice was most kind and timely. Why should a woman have to live under the old-fashioned constraint which defined one set of ethics for men, and a different one for her? We want men's freedom and men's privileges, even though some of their bothersome responsibilities have to be thrown in. I'm glad I didn't live before the days I could go into a place for a drink if I wanted to. Not," she volubly rattled on, "that the particular department of alcoholic beverages especially appeals to me. That's more in Belle's line."

"Would you mind sitting down, Lou? You fatigue me."

"Dot upon her dignity! As you used to be perpetually when we first knew each other. I didn't come to stay."

"You'd better—at least, Lou, till you've digested that high-ball. Come up to my room and lie down."

"No, you don't. I'm not so far gone that I need to sleep it off. Dot, I came to ask a favor."

Lou leaned against the piano and solemnly studied my face. For me the room was decidedly chilly, but Lou was flushed and over-heated from indulgence in the early stimulant.

"You may ask as many as you please."

"And you'll grant me as many as *you* please? Really, you've grown amazingly saucy and wily. Dot, wouldn't you always take my part?" Her beautiful teeth flashed in a confident smile.

"I don't know what you mean," I answered, vaguely troubled.

"Oh, in a row or an argument, or any old thing?"

"Are you in a row?"

"Patience! You're worse than a lawyer. I mean wouldn't you make a small sacrifice, put yourself out a bit, to get me out of trouble? I'd do as much for you, I swear."

Mystified, I watched Lou growing redder as

she thumped the piano excitedly. How very potent a high-ball must be!

"I'd do anything I could, Lou, provided it was honest."

"Oh, the deuce! Well, it would be honest, of course."

She seemed to expect a reiteration of my words. I remained silent, concluding that her random talk was not to be taken seriously. Lou brought her fist down hard upon my violin-case.

"In the hour of need," said she, mockingly grave, "do we discover who are our true friends. I'll still bet on you, Dot."

I had nothing to say. I wished very sincerely that my violin practice had not been interrupted. Suddenly, after quite a pause, during which I listened nervously to the beating, spattering, driving rain, so soothing, so annoying, according to our chance mood, Lou darted to the piano and began to play and sing, "Coon, Coon, Coon!"

She has a clear staccato touch, and the kind of ringing voice which is best adapted to ragtime. Rolling her eyes, grinning so that her teeth were visible in all their glory, nodding her black head at petrified me, she flew along in a whirl of sound and motion. Abruptly she stopped. I started as the silence struck me. Lou rising from the piano was her pale, sobered self. The change was marvelous.

"That was a dirge to my wasted youth," she said, quietly. "My kind of a dirge. I am thirty, Dot, but I'll be happy yet."

Lou straightened the fulness in her red blouse, picked up her hat and told me to go back to my practising. Mechanically I helped her put on her coat. Like all her clothes, it fitted her to creaseless perfection, and despite dampness and limpness, Lou stood before me a model of finished elegance. Only pre-occupied indifference was in her face; flush, impishness, and all traces of a high-ball were gone.

"How pretty you are, Lou!" I exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Think so? I'm too thin, but thank you all the same."

"Won't you wait and let me telephone to the stable?"

"No, for goodness' sake. I want the walk in the pour. It's good for the skin, and I haven't any rheumatism."

"Are you going home?"

"Yep—No—Let me see! Yes, I think I will. May I use your phone?"

"Of course. Why this sudden formality?"

Lou's laugh fills in all pauses, embarrassments and unspoken replies. A gay peal answered me and she rushed to the instrument.

I tried not to listen—honestly I did—and I paid no attention till I heard:

"Yes, my house at two. I'm dying of the blues. Did you ever see such a day? An engagement?"

Silence for a few seconds, then my end of the conversation—always to one listening so comically like a monologue, in which words have become mixed or forgotten—was resumed:

"Break any and all engagements you have. I don't care for the consequences. I shall not touch a mouthful of luncheon till you arrive. You'll come? All right. If you don't, I'll make for the river. Good-bye."

"Were you talking to Mr. Allison?" I inquired, severely, as Lou returned to me.

"Was I? If you thought I was, why are you so cross about it? See here, Dot, do you fancy any sane person living would take a dose of Allison for the blues?"

"You horrid, wicked woman! And you made Percy promise to luncheon with you!"

"The same time, dear, I give you permission to have Arnold Allison here." This with a delicate, attenuated sneer, which galled all the worse because it was so daintily calculated.

"Oh, Lou, how can you?"

She was going, and stopped near the door.

"I forgot one piece of news, Dot. Addie Lay-

ton has her sixth—another boy. Won't it be a relief to have the number changed? Imagine her rendering of the refrain—'*Six* helpless children.' Can't you hear her now?"

"I must send some roses—" I said, thinking aloud.

"No, don't; Addie threw a boxful at the head of her husband, as I stopped to leave my congratulations on the way here."

"How in the world do you know?"

"Oh, the door of her room was open, and I heard her sweet voice altercating, and then the box came over the banister and down the stairs. Poor Layton ran down to explain that Addie was a bit nervous."

"If only some men weren't such sheep!" I exclaimed.

Lou eyed me coolly.

"I presume you allude to Layton and Allison," said she, unemotionally. "And neither one has a lamb for a wife."

I recalled my unfortunate quarrel with Jack. He is not a sheep but his wife is far from being a lamb. Upon occasion she has come suggestively near the category of a goose.

"Lou," I began, rather meekly, "why do you make yourself out so much worse than you are?"

"I never do. You needn't accuse me of that. And see here—you won't be shocked by me

much longer. I'm going away again—Oh, for an awfully long time—in about a fortnight. Some far-off cousins have asked me to Jekyll Island, and I'm going as soon as Blanchesi sends my new togs."

"You're only home from the West about a month. Is Mr. Allison going to Jekyll Island with you?"

Lou opened her eyes enormously wide. Then she fairly shrieked with laughter.

"Arnold going with me? You may bet all Jack's worth, that he's not. How awfully funny you are, Dot!"

"I'd rather be funny, as you call it, than unprincipled," I hotly returned. "Don't you think a wife has any duties whatever?"

"Why!" exclaimed Lou, putting on an exasperatingly innocent look. "Arnold wouldn't leave his nice times with you, you know, even if I wanted him. Jekyll Island wouldn't have the ghost of a chance."

"Oh!" I cried, too angry to get out another syllable.

"Good-bye, dear little innocent! If Allison comes, don't send him home early. I trust your power of fascination."

Another laugh, a kiss, and the door slammed upon her. Probably she had no idea how her words had stung me. Mr. Allison was here very

frequently before the Holidays, to play trio-music with Marion and me. Did Lou not understand that music, and music only, was the attraction? Did she not know me? Did she not know Jack? A painful flush rose to my hair. Did others besides Lou jest about Mr. Allison's visits at my house? To flirt with anyone outside of Jack, had never been even a temptation. Was I to be punished for believing myself so much better than most of the women I knew?

I could no longer practise. I was too astonished and angry and alarmed. How dare Lou insinuate, even in fun, that I had been coquetting with her husband? As if Allison would be the kind to infatuate me! What had I been saying to myself? Was I tactily admitting that there were other men with whom I might flirt? No, no, no! Impossible to make myself so cheap. I love Jack dearly, and I am tremendously proud of him, and he is certainly good to me. *If I hated him and had made a wretched mistake,* I should value myself too highly to acknowledge such a miserable state of affairs to the world, by seeking the diversion of a flirtation with some one else.

I am very fond of Mr. Allison, and should not hesitate to tell Lou so. Were he disposed to flirt, I am much too old-fashioned to admire him as I do now. His passiveness about his wife's

foolish conduct has frequently angered me, particularly at first, when I judged from the surface of things, and believed Allison as free from emotion as his absolute self-possession might indicate. Lately I understand him differently—although I still feel I am far from knowing him—and often fancy that sudden flashes of deep feeling escape him, without his suspecting the fact. Before I recover from the surprise, he is Allison again. And, longing to be his friend, I am far off somewhere in the field of acquaintances, with the sensation of having been courteously and coldly told, "No farther, please." Even among men, I am certain Allison has no intimate friends. Perhaps longing for Lou's affection, and failing in receiving it, he shrinks from asking any love of other people. It is not difficult then, to comprehend how a shy, proud man, having given his utmost devotion, could not approach a woman upon the subject of her love for another man.

What good will this affair with Percy do Lou Allison? She cannot marry him. And would he have Lou were she free? When the forbidden fruit is flung before us with the importunate command to eat it, its beauty and flavor soon depart. Great is the glamour of the unattainable! The dramatic agony of hopeless love stimulates devotion till the apparently insurmountable obsta-

cles are swept away; then the dream, the agony, and often love itself vanish with the obstacles, at the very moment that Society says, "Bless you, my children."

Huddled upon the couch in my room—that pink bower which has witnessed so many of the tears of its unappreciative owner—I went deeper and deeper into a brown study where no rosy hue penetrated. I had thought I was learning my lessons of social etiquette, polite lies, intrigues and shams. It had been a shock to receive Lou's laughing words about her husband coming to see me. Had Marion known that people said things? For I had rushed to the conclusion that I was the subject of gossip, and if so, Marion had wilfully left me in ignorance. How intolerably mean! Was even Marion not a true friend? Oh, I would not believe she had neglected warning me if she knew anything about my name being dragged into the Allison difficulties!

I have not seen much of Marion lately. She is more than ever hopelessly devoted to charity, besides spending more time with her mother than formerly, partly to prevent her from hearing much about Neddie Lawrence, and partly because Mrs. LaGrange has recently been in rather poor health. Marion herself is looking old and worn. Her girlish freshness is being lost in the lines and shadows of a tired woman's face.

I tried to deceive myself for a while, as one fain would where one is fond. Now I have to give in that Marion, not yet twenty-one, is fading. I heard two insipid youths discussing her at Sherry's one night last week. There were plants between them and me, and they did not take the trouble to look around, when, having in mind an occasion upon which I failed to do so, and heard something not meant for my ears, I furiously coughed.

"Marion was beastly pale, don't you know," and her "cheekbones were beginning to be deucedly prominent;" altogether they concluded she was "no longer in it with the débutantes."

One of the wonders of life is that strange species of insanity called love. One woman loves one man out of the earth's millions, and loves him so madly, that while thousands are handsomer and nobler than he, if she is doomed to live without him, she will either pathetically die or continue to exist a sorry shadow of what she might have been, crowned with the happiness of possessing her idol. Then a man loves a woman so passionately, that being denied her, he takes to a pistol, drink or cynicism, and in one of the three ways, ruins all his chances in this world and the next. Marion could choose among half-a-dozen, and here she is wasting youth and beauty because the particular Percy regards her in the

calm light of a nice girl for some other chap to marry. Verily there is no greater joy, no deeper misery or mightier power in the universe than love. I have heard middle-aged women with grown daughters and shrinking incomes talk this winter about love being out of style, and not at all necessary in the bestowal of their girls in marriage. If the daughters themselves reach this godless condition of regarding matrimony as a blameless method of relieving parents and obtaining a splendid home and stunning gowns, there will be some excitement five or six years from now, when Love, thwarted and insulted, claims as victims the hearts which have already been, falsely and blasphemously at God's altar, pledged for a life-time's service and devotion where cold indifference is the least evil one dare expect.

Love will never go out of style, nor will it always strike in the direction most desired by the on-lookers. Do I not wish Marion detested Percy Earle? To be more honest, how I long to force Percy to turn from Lou Allison and see what a girl he is making wretched! Ten years younger, twice as pretty, a thousand times more gifted and refined! Oh, besides all its glorious attributes, Love is, in a case like Percy's, not merely blind, as the proverb has it, but deaf, dumb and imbecile!

Browner and browner grew the study into which I had sunk. How had I ever been careless and happy, as they say in Graytown, from "sun-up to sun-down?" There were tragedies in the world then, miseries, deceits, heart-aches, disgraces, and I floated through a cloudless ether of ignorance and unconcern, pitying no one, helping no one, half unconscious that I possessed a soul. Is it because I am so horribly unspiritual that the awakening to the truths of life brings such despair? Jack has patiently reasoned with me against a habit of morbidness, saying that in my secluded and guarded life at home, I was wholly ignorant of the wide possibility that most people have heart-histories which, although not dead, are scrupulously and persistently held down alive in their graves by their owners.

And now Mr. Allison! Would I again hear jests about my friendship for him? Oh, I could not stand it! And I would not! They had criticised me, ridiculed me, made it hard for me in every conceivable way, these New York women who did not care to welcome the unknown, penniless country-girl into their midst. The first hard experience over, I could bear nearly everything of this nature, because I realized who I was, and who were many of my persecutors. But scandal! No, I should die, if women giggled and men shrugged their shoulders when I entered a room.

Once, in a little inn upon the Rhine, I came across a small devotional book in French, the first chapter of which discoursed eloquently upon "Human Respect." It was immensely clever in a deliciously naïve way, as are so many little pious French books; and engulfed in miserable thoughts as I was, I vividly recalled some paragraphs about "the power to change our ideas, endeavors and actions, in even the unspoken, and ought-to-be-unknown, opinions of neighbors and acquaintances." At the time I pictured the volume in the course of composition on the worn old desk of some Monsieur le Curé, whose saintly calm had been frequently jarred by the gossipings and backbitings of *Monsieur le Boulanger* and *Monsieur le Cordonnier*, by the petty cheating and huge indignation of *Madame la Blanchisseuse* and *Mademoiselle la Couturière*. My own recently acquired experience as to the dread of the scathing cruelty and injustice of public opinion, made me yield a mournful acquaintance to the views so cleverly put forward by the earnest Curé. Strange that the lonely man in his restricted sphere of village pastor, so successfully expressed the thoughts which New York itself evokes! Ah, human nature!—What is it but the weaknesses and strength, the limitations and capabilities comon to all? No doubt, *Monsieur le Curé* had abundance of human nature to deal

with among his simple, unambitious, grubbing parishoners. And the whole world is still kin.

As the afternoon waned, brighter possibilities filtered through the murky clouds of my thoughts. Lou was half-crazy. She had taken that reprehensible high-ball. I could not believe that she meant to hint anything unpleasant. Impossible that anyone should consider me a flirt.

Perhaps too, all that scare she gave me about law, had its origin in the same alcoholic beverage. Jack told me long ago that neither Lou nor Belle owns any real estate, and I am sure there are no wills being contested in the family. There is no reason for Lou being at law about anything under the sun.

I believe that high-balls, if permissible at all, should be relegated exclusively to strong men.

* * * * * * *

There are more matters than a guilty conscience which at times give one a horror of being alone. Not that my conscience is blameless, only I fail to find it very rebellious, alone or otherwise. It may be that it is one of the convenient kind that "still sleep". Nothing but restlessness made the house unbearable yesterday. I could not stay alone without screaming, nor would I see anyone I disliked. Marion saved the situation. Quite wrought-up and desperate, I walked down to her house, feeling that if she

were out, there was no telling what I might do next.

She was at home, the maid said, hesitatingly. Where?—Upstairs with Mrs. LaGrange, who had a severe headache. I stepped past the deliberating servant and went directly to Marion's room; she was not there. Going back one flight of stairs, I knocked at Mrs. LaGrange's door. No one answered in words, but there was a rustle of skirts, and Marion gently opened the door.

"Is it you, Dot?" she said, in a low voice. "Come in. You won't mind, mother?"

Mrs. LaGrange lay upon the couch, her eyes glazed with pain. Marion had bound a compress across her mother's forehead, and held a vinaigrette in one hand, while she unfastened my jacket without speaking. Did they always take headaches so seriously at LaGranges'?

"I'm so sorry you're ill," I began, feelingly.

"I'm not ill, dear," Mrs. LaGrange interrupted. "Tell her, Marion."

Alarmed I turned quickly to Marion.

"What has happened?—Why didn't you send me word?"

"It has just happened—scarcely half-an-hour ago. It's a letter from Neddie."

Marion's voice was very cold.

"Has he gone home?" I asked, knowing very well he had not.

"No—He's gone to Canada, probably."

Marion had a basin of ice on a table. She went to it, wrung out a fresh compress, and proceeded to change the application on her mother's head. Mrs. LaGrange moaned faintly, as she turned her face toward her daughter.

"Yes, you're suffering for that foolish boy," Marion replied to the moan, in the same unimpassioned manner. "I can't bear to think of that, mother."

"He's young," said Mrs. LaGrange, faintly and pleadingly, "and he wasn't strong enough to resist bad example."

"He shouldn't have broken your heart. The ingratitude is shameful. Won't you show Dot the letter, mother?"

Mrs. LaGrange drew her hand from under the worsted rug Marion had wrapped about her. I leaned forward and took the sheet of paper curiously. It read:

"My dear Cousin:

It may seem strange to you that I write to beg forgiveness for an act which I ought to be ashamed to acknowledge. I have for some time been unworthy of the kindness and great interest that you and Marion have showered upon me. There can be no excuse; that I fully understand, but I beg you to believe

that in the last few weeks I have continued to play cards in the desperate hope that one day my luck would change, and I should be able to clear myself of the debts I have so unfortunately contracted.

The confession which it half kills me to make to you, is that I have used fifteen hundred dollars of the bank's money, besides having borrowed from a number of your personal friends. Although I am leaving the city like a thief, will you try to pardon me and believe that I shall go somewhere and work hard until the money I have squandered, yes and stolen, has been returned? I shall write the pitiful truth to my poor mother, and all I can say to her, as well as to you, is that I have been undeserving of the favors I have received.

With bitter regret for my faults and failings, believe me still, my dear cousin,

Gratefully and humbly,

EDWARD LAWRENCE."

Awe-struck, I glanced from Mrs. LaGrange to Marion, and back again to Mrs. LaGrange.

"Does it mean he has actually *stolen?*" I asked.

Mrs. LaGrange quivered at the word.

"They call it defaulting," said Marion. "The

suffering for mother is the same, whatever the name."

"Oh, Marion, don't!" said the mother. "Have a little pity. He is hardly more than a child. You have acted so queerly ever since the note came."

Marion was outraged in what was, next to her love for Percy, her strongest feeling: her devotion to her mother; and her nature resented the action that brought pain to Mrs. LaGrange, in a stronger manner than most people would have believed possible for her.

"Some are born criminals, some attain criminality, some have criminality thrust upon them," the girl went on in a hard voice. "The last is Neddie, I fancy."

Her eyes met mine. In spite of outward coldness, a great heart-sickness was within. By some undefined sympathy, I knew she was regretting having given Lawrence money to settle his debts. I recalled the scene at the Mission-room, and anger overcame my better judgment.

"Mrs. Robertson is the one who should suffer for this," I cried. "She taught him to drink and to gamble."

"Yes;" added Marion, "she did."

"Don't, children, don't!" Mrs. LaGrange pressed her hands against her forehead distractedly. "I am the one to blame; I should have

brought him here to live. Oh, I did wrong to let him have rooms where I could not control him!"

"He would have been the same, mother. He'd have met the same people." Marion's tone was more judicial than soothing.

"But you could have restrained him, Marion," reasoned the mother, relentlessly arguing her own condemnation. "And I confess I didn't bring him here because I was afraid he would fall in love with you! Oh, I'm punished for my maternal vanity and conceit! And now what shall I say to *his* mother? What account can I give of the responsibility I undertook?" Mrs. LaGrange's face contracted with physical and mental pain.

"Hush, mother! You must not speak so. You are not to blame. It's the wretchedness into which society is degenerating—above all the women. If there were only a few more like you!"

Marion knelt down and tenderly stroked her mother's cheek, her own face beginning to tremble, and her unnatural constraint giving way. The great resemblance in the two faces shows most strikingly when they are brought closely together, particularly since Marion has begun to look so much older. Snow-white hair would make Marion her mother's counterpart; and she

will have it while young. There are already a few stray white threads in her coal-black hair. As mother and daughter clung to each other in sorrow and affliction, I felt dreadfully outside and forgotten.

"But I'm not so easy to fall in love with," Marion supplemented after a while, struggling to overcome the grief to which she had almost succumbed. "On that score you might safely risk a whole University of boys!"

"Don't try to jest, Marion. It's too ghastly. My poor child, what will you do when the papers print the story in the morning?" Mrs. LaGrange's mouth quivered, and she drew Marion tightly to her, as if she were a small child to be protected from bodily harm. "To think that misery and disgrace must come to you through a member of my family! My dear daughter!"

"I don't mind anything so long as I have you," Marion declared, swallowing hard. "Nothing whatever. Only get over this dreadful headache, and be well, and I shall bother about nothing else."

"You are trying to feel that way, Marion, I know. But it is all very dreadful, and it will always remain my fault." The big tears rolled down Mrs. LaGrange's colorless cheeks. With the bursting of a great sob, Marion slipped forward and hid her face in her mother's shoulder.

I tip-toed out of the room, leaving Marion and her mother weeping together. And up in the country there was another mother who would be crushed almost unto death under the blow of a son's disgrace. I know and understand the harsh and frank way in which such sins are regarded in little, old-fashioned places, where everyone knows everybody else. The mother would not condemn him. Mrs. LaGrange, who was only some one else's mother, had not done that. But the agony would be all the greater because no salutary anger and indignation would stay the flow of the bitter water of unmitigated sorrow.

Sadly enough I let myself out of the house. The day was very cold, and out of doors most uninviting. That is one of the ways in which the city is so different from the country. In Graytown when one felt excited or angry or blue—or when anything important happened, like a death, for instance—one went out of the house to breathe and feel better; and the action was considered natural and proper, because one's front-yard and back-yard are as much one's property as the house itself. In New York it is dangerous to go to the window; people might think the house was on fire and that a policeman was wanted to turn in an alarm. And as for going into the streets for rest and relief—the stones would cry out: "This is a public thoroughfare

and public property—Go back where you belong" Oh, how delightful it is to own a little out-doors, although the little is not bigger than dear father's front-yard in Graytown!

I was plodding wearily along against the wind when at the corner of Fifth Avenue I almost stumbled against Percy Earle. He exclaimed in surprise as he recognized me:

"Why, how do you do, Mrs. Woodward? Have you heard the news? No?—Jack's all right. But Robertson's lost heavily."

"What do you mean?" I stopped where I was, greatly alarmed by Percy's face.

"The worst panic the 'Street' has ever known. May I walk up with you? Thank you. I'm on my way to see Jack, if he has left his office. Robertsons' about wiped out, unless he has more back of him than people think."

"What was it? Can't you tell me? Jack says I'm not so stupid." I was hurriedly calling upon my memory for terms used on the "Street."

"Do you know what a 'corner' is? Well, they had a corner in Criss-Cross and forced the shorts. It was desperate, I tell you. By the way, have I a collar on?"

I obediently looked up at Percy's neck. Yes, he had a collar—rumpled, and not at all like Percy's collars as I knew them—but his tie was

gone. He smiled apologetically, and I suddenly noticed how worn his face was.

"Did you lose, Mr. Earle?" I anxiously asked.

"Not a great deal. And Van Voort was in on Criss-Cross all right. They say Mrs. Robertson's mother had two thousand shares. I'll wager she did, but that won't help Robertson any. Odd, isn't it, that her mind is so clear upon business, and so muddled about everything else? Her miserliness is a kind of insanity; her own daughter might starve before she would part with a dollar."

"Are the Robertsons ruined?" My mind refused to accept the idea. How could such a lot of money disappear in a day?

"Yes, unless Robertson has something in his wife's name. I know nothing about her side of the affair."

Percy was cheerful enough, although dreadfully excited, and he had no idea how fast he was walking. Between struggling to keep up with his rapid gait, and the disagreeable wind which was blowing straight at us across the Park, I was breathless when we reached home. We entered the house from out of a kind of gale.

"Hello!"

Jack had been only a few minutes ahead of us. He was still in the hall, and he turned to me a pale and weary face.

"Jack," I gasped, catching hold of him, "are you really all right in spite of the 'corner'?"

"Yes, little one. What has Percy been telling you? Come into the library, old chap. It's mighty rough on Robertson, isn't it?"

"I should say so. Brompton told me the old man grew desperate. He couldn't have been as rich as people thought."

"Are you not hit at all?" Jack's anxiety for Percy pleased me.

"Hardly. Thank the fates!"

The bell rang sharply. I sprang up, fancying an unwelcome caller: for I still had my hat and gloves on, and was altogether in need of Perkins's ministrations. The man brought in a note for Jack. I sank back relieved, till a heavy frown gathered upon Jack's forehead.

"It's from Robertson, Dot. Would you mind if I didn't get back for dinner?"

I pouted. It was impossible for me to comprehend that the Robertsons were in real trouble, and I was not so fond of them that I would willingly allow Jack to go to them and leave me to a spoiled and lonely evening.

Percy laughed lightly.

"Be good, Mrs. Woodward. Poor Robertson is in hard straits, and Jack is the only man on earth he trusts."

"Very well," I said, grudgingly. "And I suppose you'll go too, Mr. Earle?"

"Extra! Read the Extra! Terrible panic in Wall Street! Extra-a!"

The shouts of tramps with special editions of the evening papers—and it always seems to me that these Extras are special dispensations for the benefit of these tramps—broke hoarsely in upon us.

"It seems uncanny," I said, nervously. "And how grewsome the trees look shaking in the dark!"

Percy promptly drew down the shade of the window which commanded a view of the Park. A servant entered and turned on the lights. We sat silent for a minute or two; Jack and Percy very likely going on with some of the lightning calculations they had worn themselves out with all day, and I wondering how Mrs. Robertson, poor, would impress me. The stillness was broken by Percy apologizingly asking Jack for a tie. Five minutes later, the two men left the house together, while I heartily wished that I might go with them.

Disspiritedly I started upstairs, and at that moment the bell rang. I paused expectantly. Another note—this time to Mr. and Mrs. Woodward. I tore it open upon the stairs.

"Mrs. Alexander Robertson begs to announce

that owing to her serious indisposition, her ball will be postponed from to-night to three weeks hence."

The communication brought the recollection to my mind that upon this evening Mrs. Robertson was to have given *the* ball of the season at the Waldorf-Astoria. In the last few days I had entirely forgotten the momentous invitation.

"Jiminy!" I breathed, the situation beginning to dawn upon me. That expression was a relic of my barbarous, blissful days at home in Graytown. As I proceeded to my room, I earnestly hoped the servant had not heard it.

Jack returned in two hours. I was at the table, and he came in saying he was starved.

"You look it," I said, sympathetically. "How are they, Jack?"

Jack unfolded his napkin deliberately.

"*Après*," said he, quietly.

So I had to wait until we were alone. Then I heard all the news condensed and to the point. Robertson was practically penniless; Mrs. Robertson had for years been living beyond their income and had, unknown to her husband, heavily mortgaged the sumptuous house, which had been his wedding-gift to her.

"Jack!" I cried, excitedly.

"Well?"

"She's used her gambling gains to pay the interest on the mortgage!"

"Exactly. You're growing apt. Only the last interest was never paid. She is in debt everywhere—including thousands for diamonds."

"What will they do?" I asked, appalled.

"It was a hideous scene, Dot dear. Mrs. Robertson is leaving on the nine o'clock train for Maine."

"Not to go to that awful mother?" I was more appalled than ever. What a fate she had dared!

"She has no choice, while Robertson remains in the rage he's in now. Bad as she is, I pity her when she reaches her mother."

Neddie Lawrence darted suddenly into my seething brain, and with him the picture of Mrs. LaGrange and Marion in their despair.

"I don't pity her," I said, savagely.

Jack smiled indulgently.

"You always did seem to dislike her uncommonly."

"I'm glad I did," I continued, warmly. "Wait till you read about Neddie Lawrence to-morrow! It's worse than the panic, for Marion and her mother are heart-broken. Jack, he has stolen from the bank!"

Jack almost pushed me away from him.

"Dot!" he cried sternly, "are you sure?"

"I saw it in his own handwriting."

"The devil!" said Jack, unfortunately breaking his record of which I had been so proud.

"Yes, the devil with poker and whiskey as baits," I hastily said, not wanting Jack to know that I took the exclamation as a swear. But he went on, terribly, awfully, frightfully:

"It's a damned shame!"

And I could not cover that up, could I? Jack is, in spite of all his perfections and high-mindedness, mere man after all, and even his theories go to pieces once in a while, when too great a strain is put upon them.

I should not want him to be quite an angel, even though opposites do attract—Really, I am not wicked enough to need a genuine angel to live with me. Jack suits me as he is—Mostly very good, and slightly—a little naughty. The conclusion is apparent.

* * * * * * *

Neddie's escapade received only a small notice in print. The panic was too enormous, too far-reaching not to overshadow any little individual case of a blackened name and a few broken hearts. Mrs. LaGrange is ill from the shock and disgrace. Marion finds compensation, as always, in rescuing wrecks of humanity out of the slums. She looks more unhealthily pious than ever, and

I begin to be slightly tainted with Jack's belief in her ultimate retirement into a Sisterhood.

I read over some of these pages the other day. They are a queer record of gay society! Almost all the people I know belong to those who are chronically busy enjoying themselves. Why then, in the name of reason, are they so conspicuously innocent of a good time? Dancing and big bills and betting and noise do not seem, in the aggregate, to amount to such very undiluted happiness. Common sense whispers to me that the latter is made up of different ingredients.

* * * * * * *

Where shall I begin and how shall I express the chaos of thought in which I seem to lie half-stunned?

It was yesterday morning, yes, only yesterday morning, that Lou sent me this note:

"Dearest Dot, come stay all day with me. Belle is under the weather and I am very despondent. LONELY LOU."

Jack had gone, and I had no definite engagement until evening, when I, as well as Lou and Belle and all of us, would go to the Mardi Gras at Sherry's. Last week, the day she was feeling so blue, Lou telephoned for Percy Earle. My heart fluttered happily at the gratifying thought

that she was reforming, and I was the proper substitute for her usual guest when she needed consolation.

Jubilantly I made my way down to the Allison house—swinging along Fifth Avenue at a rate I have rarely indulged in since I left Graytown. In the morning throng I did not meet a familiar face until I reached the Waldorf, when Mr. Van Voort came sauntering along in indolent leisure, smoking by fits and starts. He stopped and perforce, I gave him my hand. We do not agree with one another any better than we ever did; he is too monumental a moneyed nonentity, and I suppose on the other hand I am too raw a recruit from pinching poverty.

"Where so early, my dear Mrs. Woodward?"

Oh, what a disfiguring grin! Inwardly, I resented the "my dear" and answered as I started off:

"To Allisons'."

"Oh!" A light exclamation, but a trenchant laugh.

Involuntarily I paused again for a second. Mr. Van Voort was in the act of lifting his hat, and his grin had spread, I believe, almost to the back of his head.

Flushing as broadly as he grinned, and muttering a ferocious "Good-morning" back at him, I hastily resumed my walk, all pleasure, all spirit,

except an evil one, knocked out of me. Lou had jested, and that idiotic Van Voort had chuckled. What would come next? Although almost everyone I knew lived in a glass house, all without exceptions were throwing stones, and the breaking of the crystal was maddening.

Lou welcomed me very sweetly. She was gotten up in a street-gown, for her a strange proceeding in the morning, and she talked and acted more gently than ever before in our acquaintance. Yes, it must be that Lou was reforming. How beautiful if I had been the instrument!—And why not? Was it an impossibility for me to be of any use in the world? Might I not bring Lou at least to the point of giving up Percy, and then would not my Marion win the boy? Percy was impressionable, young compared with my Jack, and very unformed in character. Probably this pitiable affair with Lou would prove to be the folly of a first fancy, which would shrivel up in self-mortification as soon as actual love claimed him.

"I suppose you want to see Belle a few minutes?" Lou was saying. I had not been listening very attentively.

"Yes; is she in bed?"

"No; only lying on the couch." Lou dropped her voice. "She is killing herself with morphine, poor girl."

"Can't you prevent it?"

"No, not here. Perhaps," a peculiar smile lit Lou's face, a dreamy, slowly-growing smile, "I shall take her to Italy next month. March will be bad for her in New York."

"It certainly will. Jack says it will be hard even for me."

"Don't say Belle looks ill," warned Lou at the door.

Truly Lou was becoming thoughtful. I had always liked her, and now she was revealing how much good was in her.

Belle in a trailing white tea-gown, lay with closed eyes upon the couch. I could not say she looked ill. Her cheeks had regained their plumpness, and a bright pink glowed in them. When I kissed her I discovered they were burning hot. She opened her eyes lazily, and I noted her pupils contracted to the size of a pin-point.

"Oh, Dot," she said, drowsily, "how are you? We talk of going to Europe next month. I might die here, you know."

She smiled a meaningless, joyless smile, negatively content because she was drugged, poisoned, intoxicated. An odd uncertainty troubled her tongue and lips, and the latter were swollen and expressionless.

"Lou," I said, hurriedly, "we'll go down and let Belle sleep."

"Yes, let me sleep."

Belle's eyes closed again. Lou shook her head, anxiety and pity in her countenance.

"Oh, Lou," I whispered on the stairs, "you *must* make her stop! She's in an awful state."

"I know it. She gets the stuff no matter how. She hasn't been out for a week, and I found a big bottle of laudanum in the mattress of her bed to-day."

"Where on earth did she get it?"

"There is only one possibility—She bribes the maid, Annie."

"She would stoop to that?" I asked, incredulously.

Lou shrugged her shoulders.

"A morphine-fiend has already stooped so far, my dear, that another dip or two won't signify."

Lou's dignified condemnation of her sister's failing was very touching. I cuddled up to her in affectionate and admiring sympathy, as we returned to our favorite divan in her small drawing-room. Belle seemed gone beyond redemption, and I was so glad—very selfishly and ignobly, of course—that I had never been fond of her. My friend, Lou, was developing into a sweet and resigned woman, and I began to hope that all the tangles about me were to be undone, so that the beautiful pattern of my life as Jack's wife could go on weaving itself

into smooth and brilliant perfection. It was very humiliating to have found myself so dense and dull in comprehending the personalities about me. Why was it that often, mostly on a windless, cloudy day, and in some lonely bit of country, I could see and hear the people of hundreds of years ago passing, riding and afoot, laughing, talking, animate as I myself? In Germany I could see the wild barons in their suits of mail go clattering up the rocky paths to their stern, threatening castles; in France and England, watch the worn-out pilgrims returning from the Holy Land. These creatures of a far-off time for a moment I knew and understood, and pitied or dreaded or admired. When the vision left my mind and I stood beside Jack in the present, I drew a quick breath and felt oddly lonely, staring at the dusty road and motionless leaves. At Heidelberg, in the comfortless room in the crumbling Schloss, where in the old days pages waited for their lords' behests, I had seen the ruddy faces of the saucy boys, had heard their gibes and laughter, had watched them tussle and tease and bet, all under their breath, as it were, because the masters were near by. Yes, I was nearer these dead and buried ones than to the complicated productions of modern civilization which had bombarded—and most successively—my wits in New York. Marion had

remained my single solace; now I should find in Lou another preventitive of complete disgust with that congregation of self-satisfied, but—if one considers the unrest—never self-sufficient, people dubbed, "Society."

Lou had a small work-bag hanging upon her left arm. I had never seen her divert herself with fancy-work, and was immensely astonished when she pulled out the beginnings of a steel-bead purse and began to crochet. She looked, outside her piquant, American face, like a proper *Herr Lieutenant's* wife doing her afternoon's quota at a *Café Gesellschaft* in some garrison-town in Germany.

"Odd, Dot, isn't it, how men like to see women employ their fingers?"

She smiled at me, as I watched her in guilty idleness, and wished I had brought some of the handkerchiefs I am monogramming for Jack.

"Yes," I answered, certain that Allison had given her the hint, "they think needlework very feminine and becoming."

"Even," she continued, "if they have no idea to what end the exertion is put forth."

I studied her closely. She was composed in a gracious, womanly way, very different from her habitual flippancy.

"Lou," I said, earnestly, "you're changed, aren't you?"

"Not in the least." She missed a bead and poked for it.

"You're mistaken, dear; I like you better than ever to-day."

"Do you? How funny! Wouldn't you like to play to me until luncheon is announced?"

A strange blush flooded Lou's calm pallor. For the first time during the morning, her manner was forced, patently insincere, coldly forbidding of confidences. Like a rebuked child I rose without a word and went to the piano, but a sudden impulse made me look for the bow instead, and, finding it, run over a few appeggios upon Allison's violin.

"Play," said Lou, in a low voice, "Raff's Cavatina; you played it that night after your first dinner. Oh, it seems so long, long ago! It was Marion LaGrange who asked for it, do you remember?"

"Perfectly. And she isn't here now to play the accompaniment. Will you?" I felt that my tone was a little frigid.

Lou put her crochet-things into the bag, and glided over to the piano-stool, her face again soft and sweet.

"I can't do it like Marion, but I'll try my best."

She played well, and I forgot her. I was playing with Marion and was wondering what the

unnamed grief was, which shadowed her eyes. I was determining to know her better, and I was sure I was going to love her.

"Thank you, Dot. I shall never forget that night."

"Why, Lou?" I inquired, curiously. Had I been so glaringly green and ignorant that my first experience of entertaining was to remain ineffaceable in the minds of the victimized participants? The mental portion of that dinner I had never digested, and any illusion to it brought a giddiness to my brain.

"Oh, it was the beginning of—" she paused and laughed in a lower key than her wont, "of —Well, Dot, of the end."

I turned away, offended at the tantalizing answer.

"I think I'll go home, Lou. You're not nice any more."

"Yes, I am. And I'm happy too. Don't you see I am?"

"I hope so; I suppose I'm very stupid, but I can't see why you answer my question so rudely."

"Well, I beg your pardon. And now come to luncheon. There!" She kissed me noisily, and I for the hundredth time yielded to the bewitching fascination of Lou's eyes and laugh.

"If you please, Madam, Mr. Allison says

he's sorry he can't come down, but he sends his compliments to Mrs. Woodward."

Lou was unfolding her napkin when Davis delivered this speech. She started violently and repeated in astonishment:

"Mr. Allison!"

"You mightn't have known, Madam, that Mr. Allison came home sick early yesterday afternoon and as how he still must keep his room, according to Dr. Stanton's orders."

Davis brought his wide mouth together with an audible snap. Lou reddened and paled in rapid succession, and evidently she struggled hard for the voice in which she said:

"See that Mr. Allison's luncheon is served in his room, Davis."

"He's too sick for anything but soup, Madam."

"That will do, Davis. You speak entirely too often."

I sat in most uncomfortable silence. What ailed Lou? And how could Mr. Allison be ill upstairs and she not know it? Where was the reconciliation I had rashly fancied?

"Dot, dear, aren't you hungry?"

"Not very. Why are you so nervous, Lou?"

"I, nervous? You imagine it. I never felt less excited. Do you mean about Arnold's being sick? Oh, I knew he had some sort of a cold

a few days ago. It is nothing serious. Only I was sure he was at his office to-day."

I made a brave attempt to eat. Lou talked rapidly a lot of disconnected stuff that amounted to nothing, till Davis left the room. Then she sank back in her chair and neither moved nor spoke, apparently waiting for something or someone.

"Are you sure," I finally asked, "that Mr. Allison got his luncheon?"

"Oh, Davis would never neglect him. Would you like to go up to Arnold and see?" Lou was broadly scornful.

"Lou!" I sprang out of my chair.

"Well, come now, what would be the harm?" Lou sneered.

"None," I said, severely; "only that duty should fall upon his wife."

"It may fall all it likes—It will never strike her."

"And I fancied you had changed!" I cried.

"I told you I hadn't. Am I not as charming as ever? Dear little Dot, you don't know everything."

"I don't know why you begged me to come here to-day."

"You don't? Well, I'll tell you. I expected to start for Jekyll Island to-day, and that wretched Blanchesi disappointed me with my

clothes. Now you'll admit, dear, that I'm far too handsome to be condemned to shabby apparel in a brand-new field. So I've telegraphed that I'm delayed."

"And am I to console you?"

"In a fashion—um—Eh—I had other telegrams to send, also. See here, Dot. Something is going to happen, and I ought to have been out of the way long ago. Only vicious poverty has kept me here for the last six months—I mean officially here, for you know I've been away lots, too."

"If you would only explain!" I murmured, completely bewildered.

"I'm trying to—as far as is fit, at present. There is a man due in New York to-day, and when I found I couldn't be away, I telegraphed to head him off. No use, he started several days ago. Now I've wired my lawyer here—He has no fresh information, and doesn't know where the Western man is. The devil knows how the whole thing will turn out!" Lou scowled, and compressed her lips.

"What thing, Lou? Are you crazy?" Her whole manner was shocking.

"No, child. I'm both sane and sober."

"You are very strange, to say the least. Why did you send for me?" I again asked, distressed beyond measure.

"Oh, I particularly wished not to be alone today. I thought Arnold was out, I assure you."

Lou blew mischievously into my pompadour, a form of teasing which I abominate, put her arm about my shoulders and led me back to the drawing-room. I was almost helpless with confusion.

"Now, Dot, sit still and let me think a few minutes. I'm all in a muddle and may have to promptly change my plans."

She dropped into an arm-chair and huddled herself into a heap, shoulders stooping forward, elbows upon her knees and her face in her hands. Meanwhile she kept up a most irritating murmur of "M—m—m."

"Are you practicing for a play, Lou?" I impatiently asked.

"No, not in the least. Real life satisfies me. Hark! Was that the bell? Oh, the devil!"

I sighed in despair. There was no use trying to expostulate: for Davis was coming with a card.

"The gentleman has already been at Mr. Allison's office," said he, in an aggressive tone, "and insists on disturbing him here."

Lou snatched the card from the tray and stood up very straight. She considered a moment, then her face hardened. She had taken her resolution.

"The gentleman wishes to see Mr. Allison. You may take him up." Something gave a solemn finality to these ordinary words.

I watched her, peculiarly frightened. She stood rolling up her handkerchief and unrolling it, so excited that she was unconscious of the action. Suddenly I was impelled to speak. Oh, thank God!

"Lou, isn't Mr. Allison too sick to see strangers?"

She rolled the handkerchief more tightly than ever.

"Oh, he only has a cold. And he might as well know now."

"Know what, Lou?" I asked.

"Sh!" A man was passing through the hall. I saw him go quickly up, Davis in attendance. Before I could speak again Lou had darted out of the room. I heard the ring for a messenger-boy, and then she was back and scribbling at her desk. The room was full of sunshine, yet a queer darkness floated before my eyes. I had no suspicion of the truth, but a sickening horror had seized me.

"Lou!" I called, faintly.

She did not answer; she was reading a note. Several minutes passed, during which Lou remained at her desk, the note in her hand, waiting for the messenger-boy. One foot tapped the

floor; she was only half on the chair, her knee dropped down and her whole attitude one of readiness to spring out of her seat at an instant's notice.

After what seemed an interminable time, the messenger-boy arrived. Lou opened the door. Astonished at this, I was more so when I heard her say: "Take this at once to Mr. Percy Earle, 1000 Wall Street."

I jumped. Why did Lou want Percy at this juncture?

"Lou," I said, in a frightened whisper, "what is happening? There is something wrong." I had run to her in the hall.

Catching her gown I held her tightly, staring up in bewildered terror at her face. Before she had time to speak, a door upstairs opened.

"Good morning, sir." It was Allison dismissing his caller.

Lou stepped aside, crowding me against the wall as he passed us. She acknowledged his exaggerated bow by a curt nod. The door upstairs had not closed. Evidently Allison was waiting to make sure of the stranger's departure. Lou pushed me into the drawing-room, following me closely and hastily.

"Dot," said she, speaking in a low, warning tone, "remember that you are to stick to me. Arnold will probably try—"

Mr. Allison was coming, and Lou interrupted herself. Her cheeks had flushed nervously, and her eyes were fiercely dilated. She let her handkerchief fall, and her arms hung limply at her sides. As Allison hesitated a moment at the portières, Lou drew one gasping breath, and stepped backward till she leaned against some high book-shelves. There she waited, erect, silent and calm.

Mr. Allison came in slowly, holding some papers out before him in his right hand. He was dressed, save his tie, and wore bed-room slippers, as if in the hurry of his toilet he had forgotten them. Their heellessness added to the unnaturalness of his gait, which halted like that of an old man. He looked pale and ill, and his eyes were awful. I slunk back into a corner where some drapery served as a kind of consoling shield, but I had to watch and listen and I trembled, expecting I did not know what.

"Louise!" His illness made him hoarse, but not so hoarse as that.

Lou inclined her head ever so slightly, and met unflinchingly the gaze of his wild, commanding eyes.

"I have been—" he stopped to cough, and my heart seemed to check off the seconds, so slowly and hard it beat. Almost breathless, Mr. Allison finally resumed—"served with some papers

—The first in—proceedings—for Absolute Divorce—applied for by—you, Louise Appleton Allison."

Lou moved from the supporting book-case. Haughtily erect she said coldly, "Yes."

Mr. Allison's outstretched arms dropped. His figure seemed to shrink and his features contracted. Involuntarily, I cried out:

"Oh, don't!"

The room was reeling. I believe I was fainting from horror and fright when Mr. Allison's voice startled me into my full senses. It was low, steady, courteous, and he no longer looked at Lou.

"Then there is no mistake?—You wish to be free?"

That insolent figure two feet from him did not move.

Distantly, composedly, Lou answered, "I do."

The man bowed, turned, and, with head hung and shoulders bent, went out, carrying the Summons.

I wrung my hands in impotent misery, and breathed a prayer which I know now was a terrible sin. What should I say to Lou? What could I do? Oh, Allison! How could you take it so tamely!

"Thank Heaven, it's over!"

Lou spoke in a matter-of-fact way, and picked

up her handkerchief. I saw her go to a mirror and carefully loosen her pompadour, afterwards tucking in more securely a few hair-pins for which her heavy black hair was too much. Amazement at her cold-bloodedness transfixed me. I had no voice, no power of motion, no capability of reasoning.

"Lou!"

The voice came from upstairs. It was Allison calling. Lou made no reply. I wanted to say, "Go to him," and I could not.

"Good-bye, Lou!"

Clearly, piercingly, not at all like the husky voice of a few minutes earlier, the words rang out.

Ah! Lou started at last.

"What does he mean?" she cried, laughing hideously.

A pistol-shot answered her. I screamed shrilly, once, twice, a great many times. In the room above us, a body fell heavily. From the third floor came, like the crazed echo of my panic, the shrieks of Belle St. John. Then servants ran, more women screamed, and I grew still through very terror as I heard Davis cry:

"Oh, my God! The master's killed himself!"

Lou swayed and caught at a chair.

"It can't be," she muttered. "He was here a minute ago."

I rushed at her, I believe to strike her. A flying figure in a long white gown separated us.

"You fiend!" screamed Belle St. John. "What have you done now? Oh, what did we ever do, that I got St. John, and you Allison? Allison dead! The only friend I had!"

Belle broke off moaning, and tottered to a chair, as Lou pulled herself together.

"Hush! He can't be dead. It's some accident, and Davis is telephoning for the doctor."

Was it strength of nerve or lack of heart? The woman could still look proud and speak authoritatively.

"Annie, Maggie, anybody, run for some doctor in the street—Dr. Stanton is out."

Davis was giving orders in an agonized voice. I heard him rush back again to the room where Mr. Allison lay, and saw Belle St. John leap after him, like some frenzied animal.

"There is no use of my going," said Lou, in a low voice.

"There is," I said, bitterly, "unless you want the whole house to know why he did it."

Lou sat down on the edge of the divan. For an instant a look of doubt and despair darkened her face. Then she paled, but sullen determination was in every feature.

"They will know. He had the Process."

"Good Heavens! Can't you get it?"

There was commotion at the hall-door. Hurried footsteps, strange, curious voices, smothered arguing and eager questions.

Lou turned her head toward the window.

"Annie has brought a doctor—and the public," said she. At last some physical limitation was reached, and she slipped back, white and still upon the cushions.

Wretchedly I waited for a sound, a word, some message from Mr. Allison. Minutes passed. I could not force myself to go near Lou to help her. Finally she came out of the faint unassisted, and slowly raised herself upon her elbow. Courage seemed to have deserted her for the moment.

"Dot," she whispered, fearfully, "have you heard anything?"

Footsteps overhead were as plain to her as to me. I did not answer. I sat with every muscle tense and every nerve throbbing. Lou steadily gathered together her physical strength and mental assurance, and after a while calmly disappeared into the next room. Several strangers, suggestive of a rabble, thronged the hall outside. I was so benumbed by fright that these intruders did not annoy me in the least.

"Mrs. Allison?"

A pale young man, undisguisedly agitated, addressed me. His eyes were full of respectful

pity and honest admission of his helplessness. Until he spoke, I had been unaware of his presence.

"No," I stammered, relaxing a trifle from my mental rigidity; "Mrs. Allison is in the next room."

"I am here." Lou entered quietly, taking a lighted cigarette from her lips as she spoke.

I stared at her in dull anger. What an actress —and what a devil! Yet I believe now she had no idea that she had picked up a cigarette. It was a strong habit coming to her aid in her distracted state.

"The accident is," said she, enunciating like one accustomed to some other language than English, "not at all serious, I trust? There is no cause for alarm?"

The young physician gasped.

"Are you not the doctor?" asked Lou, in a bored voice.

"I am, Mrs. Allison—" a slight pause, then very clearly and distinctly he said, motioning barely perceptibly toward the group of servants and others at the door, "Mr. Allison has accidentally shot himself in a way which leaves small hope for his recovery, although he still breathes." Every word was impressively pronounced, especially "accidentally."

Lou stood silent, stunned, delighted or fright-

ened, I do not know which. I felt a great lump choking me and sending sharp pains through the back of my throat, which is the way a fit of weeping begins when my heart is breaking. Allison was dying! A suicide!

"While there is life there is hope."

It was Lou uttering the words in a mechanical way, which under the circumstances was heathenish. She probably felt the absolute necessity of saying something.

"True," said the physician. "Have I your permission to send for nurses?" He had no time to waste upon Lou.

"Send for everything that may be necessary. And first of all send those gaping intruders out of the house."

She went back to the divan and bowed her head, most appropriately, most touchingly for the strange spectators. As for me, I knew she was neither praying nor grieving. Had I been sworn to give my opinion as to the expression of which mood her pretty head and arm concealed, I should have been obliged to say that she was calculating how soon she might expect Percy Earle.

Dr. Lane said a few grave words to the human beings, hushed and awed now at the announcement that Mr. Allison had been accidentally and dangerously shot. They dispersed decently—The servants to hide upon the stairs and

listen to every word and movement, the strangers to loiter upon the sidewalk in front of the house, and imagine and report what they did not see or hear.

Short nervous messages were going over the telephone. I was bitterly sorry when Dr. Lane ceased ordering, and returned to his patient. It was a comfort to hear things sent for, nurses summoned to the aid of poor Allison in his mortal need.

Who would have believed him capable of such a deed? The quiet, methodical, undemonstrative man who never made a fuss about anything! Strong feeling seemed far removed from his disposition. Had impetuous Percy done such a thing, the insanity would not have been so completely out of character. How far must a man suffer before he dares his Creator by taking the life he himself did not give? What was Allison's inner life, which the exterior so entirely belied? Not one of us had known him—neither Jack, nor Lou, nor I. And as for Marion, I recalled what she said that dreary night we drove home from Blashfields' together: "He may be one of the still waters than run deep!" He had indeed been still, under neglect, and insult and deceit, but the waters of his sorrow were deep, and at last a mighty agony stirred their depths, an agony that overswept his judgment and rea-

son and faith in God. And he went down—a maddened atom in the raging deluge.

But as yet Allison was not dead. He was not yet out of this world we love and think we understand, and which we never can fully believe will continue to exist without us. The sunset is still for him to-night—where will he be, at to-morrow's?

"My God, have mercy!" I found myself saying.

Lou stirred.

"Please don't go into hysterics, Dot," she said, plaintively, as though she were a suffering martyr who ought to be considered and spared as much as possible. "Where is Belle?"

"How should I know? She is probably helping Dr. Lane with Mr. Allison."

I resumed my tearful praying, to be again interrupted.

"Dot, ought I to go up?" Lou turned suddenly haggard.

"You know very well what you ought to do," I answered, harshly. "For Mr. Allison's sake, I hope he is unconscious."

She winced. Then she straightened her gown and left me without a word. I watched her go slowly up the stairs, her head thrown high in defiance of her own terror. Over and over again I petitioned wildly, "Oh, God, have mercy!" not

knowing in what I hoped the mercy would consist. I had paced the length of the room a dozen times before Lou returned.

"He has never regained consciousness," she said, excitedly; "and I can't find the Summons."

My prayer died away.

"It would have been like Mr. Allison to lock it in his desk before he killed himself," I said, cruelly.

"Hush!" Lou cried, sharply. "It was an accident."

The maid Annie was answering the bell. I remorsefully regretted my speech, and realized at the same instant that it could never be recalled. An interval of black misery came between my words and recognition of Annie upon her way to the door.

"Mr. Earle, Madam. And two reporters squeezed in with him. I couldn't help it. And master a-dying!"

Lou began to tremble.

"Close the doors," she commanded. "I have nothing to say to the reporters. I will not see them, do you hear? Tell Mr. Earle to come in here."

Percy was talking to the reporters in a man's decided way—I heard "accident" three times. When he came to Lou, Annie clumsily banged the doors shut under the portières.

"What has happened, Lou?"

Suppressed excitement and alarm made Percy's tone stern.

"Percy!" With the word, Lou threw herself into his arms.

In the room directly above us, this woman's husband lay dying; forgetful of the tragedy, of her own guilt, of common every-day decency, she demanded her lover's caresses at this horrible crisis. Love is responsible for much. It is the instigator of the highest and the lowest, the noblest and the meanest acts—holy or hellish, according to its origin and aims. Unspeakably revolted by Lou's behavior, I moved towards the door.

"I am going, Lou," I said, hastily and miserably.

"No, pardon me, Mrs. Woodward, you are not." Percy supported Lou to a chair, which she had no choice but to take. "Tell me, Lou, what has happened? Is it true that Allison is shot?"

Lou looked up at him in frightened wonder.

"Did you think I did it, Percy?"

The man's face softened, and he patted her head.

"You poor girl! What a question! But why did he try to commit suicide? There must have been a cause." Darkness again settled upon Percy's countenance.

"You ask that, Percy?"

The tone was low, reproachful, piteously wretched.

Percy bit his lip.

"I do ask it," said he, sternly at last.

"To-day he received the first papers in the—" the voice grew stronger—"Divorce Suit."

An ominous silence filled the room. Percy's face seemed cut out of marble. A trembling sigh from Lou broke the spell.

"Percy!"

He did not move. His eyes were fixed and his mouth set.

"Say something to me." Lou clasped his arm and laid her face against his sleeve.

"You did it—for me?" he asked, in a voice hardly audible.

"You know I did."

A smothered groan came from Percy's drawn lips.

"Yes, dear," he said, forcing the words; "I know it."

Another mute pause, while Lou's face pressed Percy's sleeve more closely. His passiveness was like paralysis. At last Lou recognized it. She drew away slowly and her head fell.

"Are you sorry, Percy?" Cringing entreaty was in the query. Percy's brow contracted. He

put his hand to his forehead and pressed it distractedly.

"You are sorry!" cried Lou, in despair, her face twitching.

"I cannot be glad that Allison is shot." There was something desperate in Percy's distinct enunciation.

Lou's breast heaved. Bursting into wild weeping she flung herself into Percy's arms. He held her a moment mechanically, his features immovable. Earnest voices outside the door caused him to start with some sense that there was work to be done for Allison. He half lifted Lou back into her chair, she clinging wildly to him.

"Stay with me, Percy, stay with me!" she moaned.

Percy disengaged her hands.

"Your husband still lives," he said, in a far-away voice. "Perhaps I can be of use upstairs."

He drew himself up and walked slowly out of the room, his face no less white than Allison's had been. As the door closed upon him, Lou fell face downward upon the floor, not swooning or ill, but in a paroxysm of fear and anger and disappointment, scratching at the carpet with her finger-nails and beating the floor with her feet.

As I grew dizzy through fright and disgust, the door opened and Jack, sent for by Davis, came silently toward me; following him was Mar-

ion La Grange. They both stopped abruptly at sight of Lou. The next second Jack lifted her without a word and carried her to the divan in the next room. Marion took my hands and held them firmly. Evidently she had been in the house for some time, for she brought a kind of report.

"We must pray, Dot, we must pray. Dr. Stanton has come, and two nurses, and Dr. Lane will help. They have already begun to operate. There is hardly one chance in a thousand."

Twilight had fallen and Marion's figure trembled like an intangible shadow before my tired eyes. The running back and forth had ceased, and Davis, stationed in the vestibule, was preventing ringing of bells and entrance of reporters. A deep foreboding silence had taken the place of the earlier commotion and excitement. Even Jack stooping over Lou in the next room, was silent.

"Marion," I whispered, "sit close to me here, and pray if you can." I could no longer find words for a petition.

Darkness followed the twilight. No one thought of lights. Lou was, or feigned to be, asleep. The hall-clock chimed every quarter of an hour. Jack joined Marion and me, and we three sat speechless. Carriages frequently stopped before the house; the inquirers they

brought were respectfully disposed of by the waiting Davis. For a while I was conscious of every sound. Later, weariness overcame me and I fell asleep against Jack's shoulder.

About eight o'clock Jack roused himself, and I awoke. The doctors were leaving, and someone had at last lighted the house.

"There is a slight possibility that he will recover."

That was the best they could tell Jack. Allison had never regained consciousness. They had extracted the ball—Oh, yes—only the hemorrhage was very bad. One of the nurses had fainted, and then Mr. Earle had given the ether. Mr. Earle would remain all night, and Dr. Stanton would be back at twelve.

Lou stirred, arose and joined the doctors.

"It would be better, you think—" she faltered.

"What is it, Lou dear?" Marion and I heard Jack ask, gently.

"Should we not send for a clergyman?"

Was a tortured conscience prompting her?

"As you wish, dear," from Jack. "Arnold is unconscious."

"Yes, and so we needn't ask old Dr. Bliss," in a quick, nervous whisper. "The Curate of St. Clara's will come at once, I know."

"Allison detested him," said Jack, forcibly.

Then he must have quickly repented of his candor, for he added hastily, "Send for any one who will make it easier for you."

Sitting by Marion in the dark, I ground my teeth and felt like a wild animal. "Easier for her!" How much consideration did the wicked wife merit? Let them send for venerable Dr. Bliss, of whom Lou had always been mortally afraid. Of what was Jack thinking? It was Allison who was dying—Ah! And my tears fell hot and fast—Jack meant that for Allison there was no longer any help. It mattered nothing who came or went in the house where he had been the master, and where he now lay gasping unknowingly in his last agony.

Lou's voice, sweet and chastened, was summoning the Curate of St. Clara's who, in spite of Marion's rejection of him, had left neither the ministry nor New York. Afterward Lou passed through the hall on her way from the telephone, and at the open door I caught sight of her face under the strong light. I gripped Marion's hand, and she answered the pressure. Lou might speak calmly, might walk steadily, but her face, grown in a few hours old and pinched, bore the stamp of incredible horror and suffering. And yet—ashamed I hid my face against Marion's shoulder—I could not force myself to believe that the anguish shadowed heavily upon the white

countenance was for Allison. I had unfortunately witnessed the scene between Lou and Percy, as well as Lou's spasms and contortions after he had left her.

Jack had seen the doctors out. Lou returned to her improvised couch in the drawing-room, and settled herself to await the arrival of the Curate of St. Clara's. Percy Earle had never left Allison's room since he first entered it. Once I heard him speak, and somehow I was thankful he was with Allison. In about half-an-hour the Curate arrived. Lou received him agitatedly and with tears. She did not, however, accompany him to her husband. He agreed with her that she should "spare" herself. For what?

As Lou and the Curate parted, Jack brought me some coffee. I refused it decidedly, and he quietly put the cup to my lips. The hot, stimulating stuff revived me wonderfully.

"And now, dear, I shall send you home with Marion."

"Are you coming, too, Jack?"

"No, darling; I can't leave Lou nor Arnold to-night."

"Then I shall stay, too."

He tried to dissuade me, although weakly. Marion said if Jack would send a message to her mother, who was ill with a cold, she would remain with me—and that settled the question.

So the ghastly night wore on.

* * * * * * *

Cramped and chilled in the early dawn, I awoke from an unrefreshing sleep. Jack had thrown his top-coat over me, and sat sleeping soundly in a chair. Marion, awake, was at the window, her forehead resting upon her hand.

"Marion!"

"Yes, Dot," starting. "You've been asleep."

"Have you heard anything."

Marion's eyes filled.

"They sent for Lou fifteen minutes ago."

"Oh!"

"The curate came for her. He stayed all night."

"Hello! Yes! What is it?"

Jack awoke in great confusion, and stared blankly at us.

"How cold it is!" he muttered. Then he remembered where he was, and why, and sprang up eagerly.

"The doctors said Allison would be safe if he saw the morning," exclaimed he, animatedly.

"Hush!" said Marion, heart-brokenly.

She could see the Curate of St. Clara's and Percy Earle coming slowly, silently. Both men were pale, and Percy had been weeping. The Curate was posing, his hands with the fingers

pressed together as the acolytes walk in procession, his chin in the air, his eyes rolled heavenward. Percy's head was low, and tall as he is, he seemed short in his limp carriage beside the stiff figure of the clergyman. They came to us almost side-by-side. The Curate broke the message in a manner of studied impressiveness:

"Mr. Allison has just died; he never recovered consciousness."

Jack bowed his head. The Curate continued, rising slightly upon his toes.

"It would be well if you and Mrs. Woodward would go to the stricken widow. Mrs. St. John is—" he coughed—"helpless, and Mrs. Allison needs some one."

"Yes," said Jack, absently, "I shall go." He seemed stunned.

Chimes for an early service suddenly floated in upon our weary, straining ears. All started, questioning one another with quick, uncomprehending glances.

"It is Ash Wednesday," the Curate began, benignly enlightening us. "'*Remember man, that thou are dust, and unto dust thou shalt return.*' How sadly appropriate under these solemn circumstances!"

The man was affected and theatrical, even in the presence of death. He quoted in a professional sing-song and rolled his eyes frantically.

Jack turned from him to me and spoke tenderly:

"You, dear, shall not go to Lou. Wait for me here, and I'll take you home in a few minutes. The nurses will stay with her."

The chimes continued, sweet, touching, inviting, in the dawn of a new day. Percy Earle suddenly raised his head. He had worn a surplice only five years back in St. Clara's choir. His eyes, feverish and frightened, wandered piteously over the room till they met Marion's. There they rested in boyish appeal.

"Marion," he said in a kind of husky whisper, "shall we go to church together? Out in the air—I am suffocating! Then to the chapel, where it is quiet and one can think."

The girl spoke quietly, apparently without surprise.

"If there is nothing more for you to do here."

"No, no," Jack interposed. "Go, both of you. I am here, and the duty is mine. Percy was awake all night."

"And I shall be only too happy to assist," said the Curate, unctuously. He supplemented this with a sigh and the remark, "Although I was awake all night, too." He had at last allowed his prayerful hands to assume a normal position.

"If you will remain here with Mrs. Woodward," suggested Jack, unconscious of the pen-

ance he was inflicting upon me, by assigning me to so much poorer company than my own; the Curate bowed.

They left me, first Marion and Percy, then Jack. I believe the Curate essayed some pious discourse, to which I made no response. In mute misery I waited Jack's return. People had come and gone, the chimes had ceased for an hour and begun again, before he was back and huddling me into a cloak. I was passive now, my emotions having exhausted themselves. Only once during the short drive home, a sudden recollection of Belle St. John caused me to ask where she was. Jack groaned.

"In her room, Dot, oblivious of everything. Dr. Stanton was alarmed at first. She took an overdose of laudanum."

I was not shocked nor worried. Jack carried me upstairs and Perkins, wide-eyed and curious, put me to bed. Then Jack gave me something bitter to drink, and I became drowsy. As in a dream I heard him say to Perkins:

"Burn every morning-paper in the house, do you hear? And under no circumstances allow anyone to see Mrs. Woodward."

* * * * * * *

MARCH.

Two weeks ago poor Allison was laid away in Greenwood. I begged Jack to allow me to go to the funeral, to show my last mournful respect to the man who in life had been singularly without the solace of attention and consideration. Jack remained gently obdurate, and I perforce remained at home, where I had been grieving and half-sick in my room since the day Allison died, while Jack, very white and serious in his black clothes, drove off alone to the funeral.

Perkins undoubtedly believed I was asleep on the couch in the darkened boudoir, for she stole out on tiptoe after Jack had gone. I lay still for some time, crying softly as I brooded over the thought that never again upon earth should I hear Allison's voice or see his face. As the clock struck ten I sprang up nervously. Dr. Bliss was beginning the service. "I am the Resurrection and the Life!" I could hear him, I could see Jack's pale face, and Percy Earle's! What were Lou's feelings, and how was she bearing herself?

Marion, like everybody I knew, was at the

funeral. The loneliness of my room grew unbearable. Strangely excited, I hurried downstairs, why I do not know, for the lower rooms are bigger and drearier than my own. I wandered about, pausing once at a window to gaze out over the Park where the grass was already beginning to show brilliantly green between patches of snow. There is yellow as of light in the first green of spring. Last year I had greeted it with lively joy, as the precursor of a beautiful summer; now, it only made me remember that Allison was going to his grave—in that solemn country, the cemetery, where the grass was springing as tenderly and as brightly as in the Park. The trees were bare and brown, but beautiful in the maze of interlacing twigs against a sky which was deeply blue except in one great space over the horizon, where a million pearly broken shells seemed scattered broadcast. Had I ever seen quite such clouds before?—I asked myself. I must call Jack—but no; Jack was away: for to-day they were burying Allison.

I shuddered in the sunshine, and went listlessly back to the library. Many papers lay piled upon the table. Aimlessly I picked one up, glanced at it, cried out as though in physical pain, threw it down as if it stung me, then snatched it up again.

This is what I read in big headlines:

"ARNOLD WHITNEY ALLISON A SUICIDE."

"PROMINENT YOUNG BROKER SHOOTS HIMSELF—WIFE ONE OF THE MOST BEAUTIFUL WOMEN IN SOCIETY—HER APPLICATION FOR ABSOLUTE DIVORCE CAUSE OF THE RASH ACT—JEALOUS OF HIS VISITS AT THE HOUSE OF MRS. J. WORTHINGTON WOODWARD."

I reeled. Here was the reason Jack had said reading would be bad for my eyes because I had strained them by crying so much!

"Liar!" I found myself gasping.

The paper bore the date of Allison's death. I crushed it between my hands and picked up another. I did not at once find the article I sought, but it was there—Oh, yes, it was there! Red ink this time and taller capitals!

"MAN DISCHARGED FROM WOODWARD HOUSE GIVES IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT MR. ALLISON'S VISITS THERE."

I glared at the words. At first they meant nothing. A few seconds of mental groping, and

I recollected Crosson, the man I had caused to be sent away.

"What shall I do?"

There were many more papers. Ought I find out more of the infamous falsehoods New York was reading? No—I would not. But as I threw the second sheet down, in spite of myself I read:

"RUMORS THAT MR. WOODWARD WILL INSTITUTE LIBEL SUIT AGAINST TWO DAILY PAPERS."

A law-suit, in my imagination, was a horror, a disgrace. And a law-suit about me! To be read of not only here, but in Graytown! And everything lies, black, diabolical inventions, while the guilty went untouched!

"O—O—O—Oh!"

Distracted, I ran screaming back to my room, to be rapidly followed by Perkins, who it seems, had been strictly forbidden to leave me one instant alone. Evidently for an excellent reason.

"Madam, Madam! I thought you were asleep! Oh, what will the master say, if you have seen the papers!" Perkins wrung her hands.

I pushed her away as she knelt beside me.

"It was wrong to deceive me so long! O—O—O—O! Perkins, how could you lie to me? Everybody in the world is a liar!"

"I lie to you? I never did, God knows," tearfully solemn.

"You should have told me," I reproached her, bitterly.

"The master forbid. And indeed, what good could I do? The reporters asked for you often enough, to be sure. The house has been overrun with the creatures."

This last was uttered in such superior disdain that in the midst of my suffering I scented something back of it, and asked:

"What did they do, Perkins?"

"Huh! They asked a million impudent questions and when I'd answered 'em as Mr. Woodward ordered, they put me into the papers as 'Mrs. Woodward's Ancient Serving-Woman!'"

Only a step from laughter to tears, and when one is hysterical, only a jerk from tears to nervous laughter. Probably at the moment they were lowering Allison into his grave, I burst into uproarious laughter, at the title which, pictorially at least, fitted Perkins with such delicious perfection.

"Madam! O! Lordy! Has she lost her reason! What shall I say to the master? And indeed he said he feared for her mind!"

Still I laughed, painfully, mirthlessly, and could not stop.

Perkins has boundless faith in aromatic spirits

of ammonia. Having regarded me with conscience-stricken horror for several seconds, she brightened at last, and rising from her knees flew to prepare a dose for me.

Sputtering I gulped it down, and after a while, relapsed into merely an occasional giggle, which improvement Perkins gratefully laid to her medicine. When, however, a dreadful fit of weeping presently came upon me, she sat down in silent despair and cried with me, most of the long, wretched day, till Jack came home. I am not ashamed to say that I was soothed by the fact that Perkins's tears were for me.

Perkins very courageously met Jack in the hall and made her confession—I had been left alone, and had found the papers. There was an angry exclamation, quickly smothered, and followed by a few calm words directing Perkins to be more faithful to her trust in the future. Sobbingly, she promised, and reiterated her apologies again and again. With one of the mightiest efforts I have ever made, I greeted Jack calmly as he came to me, sad and anxious, and whispered:

"Never mind, dear—I had to know it some time."

"Dear little Dot! I feared you would not be so brave."

What wife who loves her husband, is not brave

so long as his arm is around her? It is when Jack is away that my heart seems breaking with grief and disappointment and the bitter sense of horrible injustice not only to me, but to poor dead Allison. I cannot sleep or rest, and I have refused to leave the house all this time. Neither will I allow anyone to see me, except Marion. She is very quiet, and will not speak of the newspapers. In truth, we are both silent and constrained during the hours we spend together, and never mention Allison, Lou, Belle, or Percy Earle. Are we afraid?

* * * * * * *

Jack took me to Lakewood for ten days. I was no better there, and was glad to come home. The newspapers have at last dropped Mr. Allison and all who knew him, from their sensational columns. But I shrink back in the carriage every time I pass anyone I know, for the stares cut me as no one, not even precious Jack, can understand, and I imagine that behind every cordial word lie unspoken ridicule and condemnation. If I dared, I would go back to Graytown, my dear old home, where only a little over a year ago I met Jack, and was so happy in the firm belief that the world was as good and true as it is beautiful!

Dr. Stanton, because Jack wished it, has or-

dered me a tonic, which I obediently swallow, and I suppose, without harm. Whenever Marion is here, I make her take some, and, oddly enough, it does seem to benefit her. She is getting stouter, and her eyes have lost their weary expression. I am glad Dr. Stanton's time and trouble are not entirely wasted, although they have not helped the patient for whom they were intended.

Lou is hurriedly settling up her affairs, as she and Belle will sail for Europe next month. Jack told me, very sadly, that Belle will probably be left in a sanitarium in Paris, where Lou purposes spending a year visiting friends. I have not seen them, nor will I, even to say good-bye. Lou did nothing to prevent my being named as the cause of her divorce. I am neither hypocrite enough nor Christian enough to forgive her so soon.

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APRIL.

Dr. Stanton has told Jack to take me to Switzerland. The doctor seems to think I need a high altitude after my recent experiences. I am quite certain that I do—Only even more a high mental plane, than any amount of material Alps. Jack has tried all sorts of diversion here—mostly along his favorite line of gifts—and when a St. Bernard puppy, a new automobile, and a whole string of pear-shaped pearls, failed to stimulate me—although administered in rapid succession—the dear old chap gave in to the blues, and I believe asked Dr. Stanton whether I were going to die. This question must have disgusted the venerable physician beyond measure. Jack told me, in rather an aggrieved way, that I possessed a perfect constitution, and that Dr. Stanton said all I needed was to be, "Gotten out of this." Which phrase, translated, means across the wide ocean—blessed barrier for many a tortured soul!—and amongst new individuals and conditions.

At this message I copiously wept: because I

weep at everything now-a-days. More mature consideration of it dried my tears. So far from the place where so much misery and treachery have occurred, I hope I shall be able to forget a great deal. That roaring ocean ought to be able to drown the voices I frequently fancy I hear, startling me in a nervous terror out of sleep, or even waking tranquillity. "Good-bye, Lou!" Those words of poor Allison haunt me dreadfully; as though his soul would not suffer itself to be forgotten, they ring out apparently close beside me, and I jump, and then cringe, waiting for the following pistol-shot.

Looking back the few months I have lived in New York, my life appears a succession of nightmares. Why was I so tortured? Ridiculed, criticised into a condition of morbid sensitiveness and distrust, at the last I was used as a scape-goat for a wicked and unprincipled woman. What brutal instinct led Lou to drag me into the presence of her tragedy? There were scores of her friends who, lightly enough, would have acted this rôle for her. Only there was none whom Allison had approved, none to whom he had ever displayed aught beyond the coldest formal courtesy. He happened to like me; and Lou, calculating cleverly as well as unscrupulously, found a plausible victim presented by circumstances, innocent as the dreams of a child.

Proud Gretchen von Waldeck! In the minds of many you stand disgraced, none the less because entirely unjustly. Why do you complain? Do not men go to the electric-chair, convicted upon circumstantial evidence? To my husband's face, Lou dared to say, "Appearances were against Dot." And for appearances am I crushed and humbled, in order that she may play the wronged one to her world. Ah well! Another wretch is deprived of his Constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, upon no firmer ground.

What did poor Emperor Frederick use as his motto?—*Learn to suffer without complaining.* I cannot. The waters of bitterness are upon me, and in my despair I must cry out.

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Lou accomplished her own defeat. She proved herself too wicked for Percy Earle. Her intended master-stroke was her destruction, and completely cured the boy of his folly. Turning in his sickening remorse and humiliation to Marion, he found all the opposites of Lou's revolting characteristics. It was not Dr. Stanton's tonic which helped Marion: Percy has been the miracle-worker and Marion's face shines in a new and different fashion, that does not cause an unhappy foreboding of her early demise. Some time before Christmas, I am to crown her with

orange-blossoms, and, as matron-of-honor, precede her up the aisle of St. Clara's, to the music of the Wedding March. Dr. Bliss, and not the curate, will officiate.

In a dusky corner of the library, Marion and Percy sit side-by-side. They talk in those short sentences following long silences, which belong peculiarly to lovers. Marion says, "Dearest," Percy responds, "Sweetheart." There was more, but I caught only these words.

The hate in my heart wavers, then fades away. Hope enters, in full strength and beauty, smiling, promising. The dim library becomes a place of refulgent glory, for love is here. Glancing at Marion and Percy, who could continue in despair?

Into the twilight the figure of the Master seems to steal, benignant as at that far-away Marriage-feast in Cana of Galilee. The miracle of love is wrought again. For, suddenly animated by a fresh, life-giving faith in human nature and its highest possibilities, my whole soul exclaims, in a burst of grateful jubilation:

"The waters—the most bitter waters—are turned into wine!"

THE END.

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